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STUDIES IN THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY

BY

CHARLES HENRY ROBINSON, D.D.

HON. CANON OF RIPON AND EDITORIAL SECRETARY OF THE S. P. G.

"Who that one moment has the least descried Him,
Dimly and faintly, hidden and afar,
Doth not despise all excellence beside Him,
Pleasures and powers that are not and that are?"

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NOTE.

THE present reprint of this volume completes an issue of thirteen thousand copies. As the argument which it contains has been found to appeal to students in several of the Indian colleges, the author has acceded to requests which have been made to translate the book into three Indian languages, Hindustani, Tamil and Telugu.

C. H. R.

June, 1910.

PREFACE.

ANSKAR, to whose labours in the ninth century the conversion of Sweden was due, when asked by the heathen to whom he was preaching, whether he could perform miracles, replied: "If God were indeed to grant that power to me, I would only ask that I might exhibit the miracle of a holy life". In the present volume an attempt has been made by means of a fresh study of the existing portrait of Christ to show that the strongest evidence for the truth of the teaching which is attributed to Him in the Gospels is the miracle of a perfect character. Until recently the historical evidence for the supernatural events there recorded has been regarded as the pillar and ground of the Christian faith. The process of reasoning has now to a large extent been reversed, and it is the picture of Christ presented in the Gospel records which renders it possible for us to believe in the Christ of history. Historical evidence for the miraculous events recorded in the Gospels, and especially for the Resurrection, is still necessary, but the indispensable preparation for an

impartial examination of this evidence is an appreciation of the character of Christ. The Gospels themselves record no greater miracle than that which is involved in the present existence of the portrait of Jesus Christ.

In Chapter XI. an attempt has been made to suggest in brief outline the nature of the contributions towards the elucidation of the Christian faith which the nations of the East may be expected to make when they become members of the Christian Church. One lesson which the peoples of India are already beginning to learn for themselves, and to recall to us, is the inspiring influence which the constant study of the character of Christ may exert. To many a Hindu who would indignantly repel the suggestion that he was likely to become a Christian, the character and life of Christ have already become his inspiration and ideal. Among the many contributions towards the elucidation of the Christian faith which the peoples of India will have to offer in the future not the least may be that which will come to us from the impetus which they will give to a fresh study of the life and character of Christ.

CHARLES H. ROBINSON.

LIMPSFIELD,

October, 1905.

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I.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST: THE FINAL ARGUMENT FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE character of Jesus Christ portrayed in the Gospels contains a threefold revelation. It reveals the Christ of early Christian history, the Christ who lives in our midst to-day, and, to borrow the daring expression of Tennyson, "the Christ that is to be". Do we ask what height human character has once attained, is now moving towards, and will yet attain? this portrait can alone provide the answer. The study of the life and character of Jesus Christ alone can enable us to interpret the past, to understand the present and to forecast the future development of human character. Furthermore our knowledge of ourselves and our knowledge of Jesus Christ are reciprocally connected. In the words of a recent writer: "To St. Paul and St. John the earthly life of Christ is the supreme manifestation of the eternal laws which operate in all things, great and small, throughout the universe. They are the same laws which govern every human life, and if we could thoroughly understand what goes on within ourselves, if we could know ourselves completely, we should know and understand the nature and person of Christ. Thus all life is a 'witness'—to use St. John's favourite word—to Christ, and, on the

other hand, the historical revelation of Christ supplies the key to all the riddles of existence.”¹

The cry “back to Christ,” though it has been used so often of late that it is in danger of becoming hackneyed, represents a desire on the part of many who use it to escape from the atmosphere of religious strife and dogmatism which tends to dwarf their aspirations after a nobler and higher life. It is true that some of those who discard religious formulas, and who profess to deduce all their rules of conduct directly from the recorded words of Christ, approach the study of these words with so many prepossessions due to a reaction from their former dogmatism that the conclusions that they deduce from a fresh study of the original records carry but little conviction to others. Nevertheless the cry is a true one. What has been needed in every age of Christianity, what is needed now perhaps more than in any previous age, is to go “back to Christ”.

In attempting a fresh study of the Gospel portrait of Christ, the special points which it is proposed to consider are : First, how far is it true to say that the description of the character of Christ contained in the Gospels carries with it the proof that such a character had a real existence ; secondly, what light does this portrait throw upon the present development of human character, whether in the case of individuals, of nations, or of the human race ; and, lastly, how far should it enable us to forecast their development in the future.

Few subjects excite less interest amongst professing Christians to-day than Christian apologetics. One reason why the average man feels a distaste for this subject is his conviction that inasmuch as he cannot express in the form of argument or syllogism his own reasons for believ-

¹ *Faith and Knowledge*, by W. R. Inge, p. 265.

ing whatever he does believe, he cannot derive much help from books of formal arguments, however unanswerable these may appear. There has been, moreover, within recent times, a marked reaction against the acceptance of the two classes of evidence on which Christian apologists have chiefly relied in the past, and which are furnished by the recorded miracles of the New Testament and by the alleged fulfilment in the New Testament of prophecies contained in the Old Testament. There are many who have little difficulty in accepting as literally true all the miracles recorded in the Gospels, but who, none the less, feel that no so-called miraculous occurrences in the physical sphere can provide satisfactory evidence of any alleged occurrence in the moral or spiritual sphere. They argue that occurrences supposed to have taken place in the past cannot be established by means of evidence which would not be received in support of any similar occurrence to-day. Imagine, they would say, that a man should appear to-day and claim to be (not the Son of God, but) a prophet sent direct from God, and that he were to offer to work miracles in support of the truth of his assertion. Imagine that the kind of miracles and the conditions under which they should be worked were to be defined beforehand by a committee of scientific experts, and that these experts were compelled unanimously to acknowledge that what they would have previously declared to be physically impossible had been repeatedly accomplished. Suppose, further, that these miracles were to be worked in the presence of a large number of spectators and under every variety of circumstance, what would their effect be? Most intelligent men who might witness their occurrence would go away, constrained to admit that they had witnessed the occurrence of what they would previously have described

as miraculous, and with a feeling of curiosity or stupefaction, but it is doubtful whether a single individual would derive therefrom any conviction that these miracles established the claim of their worker to be a Divine messenger.

If then the power to work miracles to-day would fail to establish a claim on the part of the worker to be the possessor of spiritual powers, the existence of which could not be submitted to a scientific test, it is easy to understand why this power to work miracles is rejected by so many when offered as a primary proof of the Divinity of Christ or of the truth of His teaching.

A further cause of the decreasing interest taken in the subject of Christian apologetics is the gradual change of attitude which has occurred in regard to Old Testament prophecies. Many of those who reject altogether the alleged results of the higher critics nevertheless feel that it is no longer possible to rest the claim for the truth of Christianity upon the supposed fulfilment of predictions the dates and interpretation of which are called in question by some of the best scholars.

There are, moreover, an increasing number who feel that "the logic of the understanding . . . can neither give us religion nor deprive us of it". They are perhaps inclined to echo the desire of the writer quoted above, when he says : "I am tempted to wish that all argumentative treatises in favour of or against prophecy, miracles and inspiration could be thrown into the fire".¹

If, however, the appeal to the logic of the understanding which is based upon the occurrence of miracles, or on the fulfilment of miraculous predictions, is less convincing to-day than it has been at any previous time, it has come increasingly to be recognised that the character of Christ

¹ *Faith and Knowledge*, by W. R. Inge, p. 181 sq.

depicted in the Gospels affords the strongest argument for the credibility of the Christian faith, and that at the same time the existing description of this character is itself the proof of its own authenticity. It is this latter point which will be first considered. No argument could start with fewer assumptions than does that which is based upon the present existence of the Gospel portrait of Christ. It does not assume the occurrence of anything miraculous in the past, nor that any part of the Bible contains authentic history ; it does not assume that the Gospels were written at any special time, or by any particular authors. It does not even assume that any such person as the Christ of history ever existed. All that it assumes (if indeed this can rightly be called an assumption) is the present existence of the four Gospels. No one would be prepared to deny their existence, and the argument for the truth of Christianity drawn from the character of Christ involves no further assumption. Had the Gospels in their present form been recently discovered in some ancient library or dug out of an Egyptian mummy case, and had they been but now published in English without note or comment, what kind of impression would their perusal be likely to make upon an intelligent reader who had up till now been entirely ignorant of their contents and of the doctrines of Christianity? As he read the long list of miracles attributed to the central character his first instinct would be to regard the book as belonging to the realm of poetry or imagination, whilst any claim which it might seem to make to be treated as historical he would regard as put out of court by the fact that the occurrences which it narrated were imbedded in so much that was miraculous, and therefore presumably untrue. He would naturally be disposed to compare the greater part of the miracles with others of a somewhat

similar character recorded in pagan history, and the very fact that the opening and closing miracles connected with the birth and resurrection of Christ appeared to be unique, would only add to his difficulty in accepting the rest of the account as historical.

Suppose, however, that, from antiquarian or other reasons, he were induced to read it through a second or third time, and to study it in the careful way in which the plays of Shakespeare are often studied, with the endeavour to see how far the different acts or speeches attributed to the central figure by the unknown author or authors harmonised with each other so as to depict a real human character; probably the final impression left upon him would be something of this kind.

The chief actor in this story is altogether unlike the heroes or demi-gods of the mythical past. However difficult it may be to accept the miracles attributed to Him without overwhelming evidence, there is a strange unity about the story, or, rather, about the representation of its central character. This unity is, in fact, the chief wonder of the story. The writers who, presumably, invented the character here described have succeeded in blending together, so as to produce an harmonious result, qualities never before united, and which, had this picture not been discovered, would have been regarded as altogether incompatible.

Further study would only increase the impression derived from his first examination, *viz.*, that this unity of conception is more wonderful than any of the miracles which are embedded in the narrative, and compels a respectful investigation of all that the narrative involves.

In trying to study the portrait of Christ as presented in the Gospels, as far as may be from the point of view of

one to whom the Gospel records had come as an entirely new book, it will be convenient to attempt some divisions of the subject, even if these cannot be strictly adhered to. We shall consider, *first*, the references contained in the Gospels to Christ's personal claims; *secondly*, references to what may be called moral attributes of character, and, *thirdly*, certain aspects of His teaching which illustrate some other features of His character.

I. In considering, then, the appeal which the character of Christ makes from the standpoint of Christian evidence, we notice first the *combination of the loftiest claims* which have ever been advanced by any sane man *with* the possession of a *childlike humility*. The Christian environment, in which we have grown up, makes it impossible for us adequately to appreciate the stupendous nature of the claims which are attributed to Christ in the Gospels. Nowhere, perhaps, in our own literature, are the awe and horror with which these claims must have been listened to or read in later time, by thoughtful Jews, so strikingly depicted as in Browning's "Epistle of an Arab Physician". Karshish, the physician, writing to his friend and master Abib, tells him of the interview which he had recently had with one Lazarus of Bethany, and apologises for daring to repeat to him the statements which Lazarus had made concerning "the Nazarene physician" who had restored him to life. He says:—

This man so cured regards the curer then,
As—God forgive me! who but God Himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
—'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,

And must have so avowed himself, in fact
In hearing of this very Lazarus.

The very God I think, Abib, dost thou think?

(It is impossible to maintain that the statements attributed to Christ in the Gospels represent anything less than a claim to be Divine, nor does the fact that some of the claims attributed to Christ are only recorded in the fourth Gospel affect the force of an argument which is based upon the present existence of the Gospel narratives and is independent of all considerations of date and authorship. The pretensions advanced by every other human being sink into insignificance when placed beside those which are there attributed to Him. Did ever teacher or philosopher dare to say : " Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away " ;¹ " I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me " ;² " Ye are from beneath, I am from above " ;³ " I and my Father (*i.e.* God) are one " ;⁴ " No man cometh to the Father, but by me " ;⁵ " He that hath seen me hath seen the Father " ?⁶ Even the blasphemous claim of Christ's contemporary, the Emperor Tiberius, to be regarded as one of the gods, is as nothing when compared with Christ's assertion that He was appointed to be the Judge of the whole human race ; compare the words attributed to Him : (" The Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory : and before him shall be gathered all nations. ")⁷ (Imagine such words as the following put into the mouths of Socrates, Confucius, Buddha, or, indeed, any one who could be mentioned : " He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me " ;⁸ " He that denieth

¹ St. Matt. xxiv. 25.

² St. John xii. 32.

³ *Ib.* viii. 23.

⁴ *Ib.* x. 30.

⁵ *Ib.* xiv. 6.

⁶ *Ib.* xiv. 9.

⁷ St. Matt. xxv. 31.

⁸ *Ib.* x. 37.

me before men shall be denied before the angels of God";¹ "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest";² "I am the way, the truth, and the life";³ "Without me ye can do nothing";⁴ "My sheep hear my voice, and I give unto them eternal life".⁵) Imagine any one who could claim that he alone was able to comprehend God and His purposes, or that God alone was able to comprehend him,⁶ or could dare to say of himself and God: "We will come unto him and make our abode with him."⁷ If words such as these were to be used by any one in the present day, or were attributed to one who had lived in the past, the speaker would justly be accused of overweening conceit. It would be hard to listen with patience to an apologist who should maintain that the man who put forward these claims was the humblest and meekest of men. And yet, notwithstanding that the popular impression as to the character of Christ has been derived from the Gospels, how universal is the belief that Christ was what He is said to have claimed to be, "meek and lowly in heart". Prejudiced and hostile as much of the criticism of Christianity is and has always been, what avowed critic has ever dreamt of suggesting that the Christ of the Gospels was conceited, or that His amazing pretensions were out of harmony with the rest of His character? The opposite impression has indeed been universal, *viz.*, that He was the pattern of humility. And yet, were it not for the existence of the Gospel narratives, it would have been regarded as impossible for any artist, however skilled, to portray a character in which humility and that which is always associated with its opposite, the

¹ St. Luke xii. 9. ² St. Matt. xi. 28. ³ St. John xiv. 6.

⁴ *Ib.* xv. 5. ⁵ *Ib.* x. 28. ⁶ St. Matt. xi. 27. ⁷ St. John xiv. 23.

claim to surpass others in power and goodness, were perfectly united.

2. The next point to be noticed is an analogous one. It is the combination of a claim on the part of Christ to be the possessor of miraculous powers with an extraordinary self-restraint in their use. We are not now concerned with the question of the genuineness of the miracles attributed to Christ, nor with any consideration of their nature. We have merely to do with the fact that the Being described in the Gospels professed to be the possessor of miraculous powers and with the way in which those powers were used by Him.

(There is no scene recorded in the Gospels which bears the impress of truth more visibly stamped upon it than the account of Christ's temptation. Its very uniqueness makes it inconceivable that it could have been invented; its perfect adaptation to the circumstances attending the opening of Christ's ministry renders external evidence for its truth superfluous. Two out of the three temptations are described as having been suggestions to use His miraculous powers, first to supply His own bodily wants and, perhaps, by doing so, to assure Himself or others of the reality of His own commission, and secondly to make a public display of that angelic protection which, as the Son of God, He had a right to expect. In both cases the temptation is resisted on the same ground. He refuses to use the miraculous powers, which He believed to be His, to ease His own sufferings or to secure a personal triumph. The principle which this story illustrates is one which characterised Christ's action throughout the whole of His public life.) Just before its close, when His disciples, apparently under the impression that these powers had at last failed, attempted to defend Him by force of arms, He is reported as saying, "Thinkest

thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and He shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels".¹

The author of *Ecce Homo*, in his remarks on the Gospel miracles, says, "This temperance in the use of supernatural power is the masterpiece of Christ. It is a moral miracle superinduced upon a physical one. This repose in greatness makes Him surely the most sublime image ever offered to the human imagination . . . He whose power and greatness, as shown in His miracles, were overwhelming, denied Himself the use of His power, treated it as a slight thing, walked among men as though He were one of them, relieved them in distress, taught them to love each other, bore with undisturbed patience a perpetual hail-storm of calumny, and when his enemies grew fiercer, continued still to endure their attacks in silence, until, petrified and bewildered with astonishment, men saw Him arrested and put to death with torture, refusing steadfastly to use in His own behalf the power He conceived He held for the benefit of others."²

The self-restraint attributed to Christ in the exercise of His miraculous powers is illustrated, not only by His refusal to use these powers for His own benefit, but by the limited use which He made of them for the benefit of others. This may be gathered from the accounts which are given of His healing sick people. Take, for instance, the account of the scene at the pool of Bethesda, a scene which was a microcosm of Christ's whole life. We read that there lay by the pool "a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered,"³ and then we read that out of the multitude in distress Christ relieved but one of their number. It seems strange that, if He really possessed the power attributed to Him, a single individual should have

¹ St. Matt. xxvi. 53. ² *Ecce Homo*, pp. 45 *et seq.* ³ St. John v. 3.

remained beside the pool when He passed away from it, unrelieved or unhealed. If the character of Christ had been drawn by men, who had only the data supplied by ordinary experience to guide them, or if miracles had been an afterthought in the minds of His biographers, this passage would have read, "He healed them every one".

The self-restraint in the use of miraculous powers which is attributed to Christ is an argument for the truth of the whole narrative¹ as well as for the superhuman character of the chief actor. A similar instance is afforded by the account given by St. Mark of the healing of a multitude on a Sabbath evening at Capernaum. If, as seems likely, the story was told to him by St. Peter, who is specially mentioned in it, and who was an eye-witness of what occurred, St. Mark's may be regarded as the more literally accurate of the two accounts that have been handed down. In it we read: "At even when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were sick, and them that were possessed with devils," and then, a little later, "He healed many and cast out many devils".² In this case the word "all" in the account given by St. Matthew and St. Luke may illustrate the difficulty which the early Christians experienced in understanding that the exercise of Christ's miraculous powers could have been in any way limited or restrained.

If the question be asked in reference to cases such as these, Why, if Christ possessed the powers attributed to Him in the Gospels, did He not use them to the utmost extent where the sufferings of others were concerned?

¹ A further argument for the truth of the Gospel story is afforded by the limitations of Christ's powers of healing, which are hinted at by the evangelists, *e.g.*, St. Mark vi. 5, limitations which later writers would not have dared to suggest.

² St. Mark i. 32-34.

the answer would seem to be that He had too deep a conviction of the value of God's discipline conveyed through bodily suffering to interfere with it except in rare and special cases.

How great is the contrast between the character here described and that which the writers of the apocryphal Gospels portrayed, when they attributed to the boy Jesus the working of miracles as prodigies, useless or even harmful to others! A typical example of these stories is that recorded in pseudo-Matthew, xxvi., in which Christ kills the child who had stopped up a channel through which He had miraculously made water to flow. The account which the apocryphal Gospels give is similar to the accounts contained in heathen mythologies. It is such as might have been expected to occur in the Gospels, and which, no doubt, would have occurred had the authors drawn on their own imagination, had they been writers of fiction and not of history.¹ The combination in the Gospel records of a claim to the possession of unlimited power with the acceptance of strict limitations in respect of its use and with an apparent desire on the part of the possessor to prevent His miracles from becoming generally known, is one which is without a parallel in the past. At the same time this description has appeared to the majority of those who have studied it to be as self-consistent as it is beyond the reach of the invention of the first or any other age.

A similar contrast is afforded by the combination of a sense of entire dependence upon God and a consciousness of inability to initiate any independent action which are

¹ The thought that the moral character of Christ is reflected in the miracles attributed to Him in the Gospels is developed by Latham in his *Pastor Pastorum*.

ascribed to Christ in the Gospels with a claim to practically unlimited power. Thus He is reported as saying: "The Son can do nothing of himself,"¹ and again, a little later on, "I can of mine own self do nothing".² A significant illustration of this sense of dependence is the importance which Christ is represented as having attached to prayer. If in the midst of a life of constant activity He could continue all night in prayer to God, He must have been conscious that the successful accomplishment of His life-work depended upon Him to whom His prayers were addressed. Side by side, however, with the statements which suggest the fact of Christ's dependence upon prayer may be set His words as recorded by St. Matthew³ which involve nothing short of a claim to omniscience and omnipresence if not to omnipotence: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them". The words recorded in the fourth Gospel involve a still more august claim: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it".⁴

3. We notice next, in the character of Christ, the combination of a claim to *sinlessness* with the possession of a *sincerity* transparent and undisputed. Repentance finds no place in the story of Christ's life. Its absence is not to be explained by the fact that His sense of moral obligation or His standard of duty was lower than that of His contemporaries. On the contrary His standard was so far above the ordinary human standard that no one to-day would dare to claim to have completely attained to it. Though He began His preaching with the word "Repent," addressed to all around Him, He never allows the suggestion that He has any need of what He urges upon others; on the contrary, He boldly challenges His oppon-

¹ St. John v. 19.² *Ib.* v. 30.³ xviii. 20.⁴ St. John xiv. 13.

ents with the question, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He never once admits that He has fallen short of the highest possible standard; in some of His last words addressed to His disciples He says, "The prince of this world cometh and he hath nothing in me,"¹ and in the solemn prayer attributed to Him at the very end of His life, He claims to have perfectly accomplished the work of God His Father in the world. The best and holiest men of whom any record exists have without a single exception professed repentance and reiterated the confession of their own sinfulness and unworthiness. Indeed all history, with the single exception of the Gospel story, justifies us in regarding a claim to sinlessness as inseparably connected with hypocrisy. And yet, who would ever think of applying the word hypocrite to Christ? The point under consideration is not what evidence exists to establish the sinlessness of Christ, but how did the portrait of the Sinless One contained in the Gospels originate? If this portrait was drawn from life, then the admission that Christ alone of the human race was sinless involves the admission that He was something more than human.

If, on the other hand, the portrait were not drawn from life, we are left to explain how this artificial blending of opposite characteristics was produced, an explanation which becomes ever more and more difficult the further the investigation is carried.

4. We notice next, *the combination of an unearthly dignity with humble and uninspiring associations*, such as must have been inseparable from the life of a Galilean peasant. One of the results of travelling in Palestine to-day is that the thoughtful traveller is enabled to appreciate the unromantic character of the country and its people.

¹ St. John xiv. 30.

The effect which an acquaintance with the present conditions of life in Palestine produces upon the visitor is sometimes startling. A recent traveller was accosted one day in Palestine by an American, who expressed to him his bitter regret that he had ever set foot in the land, as, by doing so, he had lost all his belief in the Christian revelation. In response to an expression of sympathy, and a request for a further explanation, the visitor reiterated his regret that he had ever been induced to travel in Palestine. The wretched condition of the country, its smallness and obvious limitations, combined with a study of the life of its present inhabitants, had made it impossible for him to retain a belief in the Gospel story. The incarnation, he said, could not possibly have taken place amid surroundings such as these. "If Christ were really to come into the world, He would come on the top of civilisation: He would come in Chicago!" The difficulty which this man felt, and expressed in characteristic language, is one which is suggested in some degree to almost every traveller in Palestine. Nothing serves to emphasise more the strangeness of the combination of a Galilean peasant's surroundings with a dignity with which no other human being was ever accredited, as familiarity with the conditions under which Christ's life must have been lived. One or two instances of this apparently unconscious dignity depicted in the Gospel story, and of the effect which it produced may be specially noted. It would be hard to conceive any one less likely to be impressed by the appearance or dignity of a Jew than was Pontius Pilate. The Romans were on the whole tolerant and sympathetic in their dealings with other races, but, as the current literature of the time shows, they entertained a special contempt for Jews. Pilate, moreover, as may be seen from his

former dealings with the Jews, shared to the full the popular feeling. And yet, as he witnessed the strange, unaccountable dignity of his seemingly helpless prisoner, his contempt gave place to a mysterious dread, which increased as he continued his examination, for, as is recorded at a late stage in the trial, "he was the more afraid".

Another illustration is afforded by an occurrence which is reported to have taken place on the previous evening. When those who had been sent to arrest Christ were confronted by Him, and, in reply to their statement that it was Jesus of Nazareth whom they sought, He said simply, "I am he," they were so much impressed by the majestic dignity of the speaker that "they went backward and fell to the ground".¹

A still more striking illustration is afforded by the reverential awe with which He was regarded by those who lived in familiar intercourse with Him. When, as St. Mark narrates, He went before His disciples in the way going up to Jerusalem, they followed, and were amazed and afraid. When, on another occasion, they had been disputing by the way as to which of them should be the greatest, they were afraid to answer His question as to the subject of their dispute. The reader of the Gospels feels how inconceivable it would be that any of those who knew Him best could have treated Him with disrespect or have taken any liberty with Him. And yet all the while as he studies the picture, he feels that this strange unearthly dignity is set amid surroundings which in any ordinary case would have appeared altogether incompatible.

Robert Browning, writing in 1876 to a friend, and speaking of the reverential awe induced by the study of Christ's life upon men of genius, said, "For your sake I would wish

¹ St. John xviii. 6.

it to be true that I had so much of genius as to permit the testimony of an especially privileged insight to come in aid of the ordinary argument. For I know I myself have been aware of something more subtle than a ratiocinative process, when the convictions of genius have thrilled my soul to its depths, as when Napoleon, shutting up the New Testament, said of Christ: 'Do you know that I am an understander of men? Well, He was no man!' Or, as when Charles Lamb, in a gay fancy with some friends as to how he and they would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in flesh and blood once more, on the final suggestion: 'And if Christ entered this room,' changed his manner at once, and stuttered out, as his manner was when moved: 'You see, if Shakespeare entered, we should all rise; if He appeared, we must kneel'."

It is true that the reverential worship with which the life and work of Christ are regarded by the Christian Church to-day is to some extent founded upon the teaching of the Epistles, specially upon the Epistles of St. Paul, but it can hardly be said that the interpretation of His life which is contained in the Epistles deepens the impression of the dignity of Christ which the plain story recorded in the Gospels produces.¹

¹ Cf. St. Luke xxiv. 52, "they worshipped him".

II.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST: THE FINAL ARGUMENT FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY (*continued*).

WE have been concerned so far with the consideration of certain passages in the Gospel records that refer to claims attributed by their writers to Christ, and which relate to His dignity, holiness or power. It has been shown that these claims were advanced by one who, contrary to what might have been supposed, was at the same time humble, sincere and consciously dependent upon external help.

The next point to be considered is the ascription to Christ in the Gospels of certain moral attributes in circumstances which it might naturally have been supposed would have rendered it impossible that He should have possessed these attributes, the perfect harmony of the description being nevertheless preserved.

1. We notice in the first place how, in the character of Christ depicted in the Gospels, a *sympathy* with the smallest details of human life is combined with the *consciousness* that *He was entrusted with a mission* which had for its object the *regeneration*, not only of His fellow-countrymen, but of the *whole human race*. Even the most sympathetic man finds it hard to sympathise with the petty needs or troubles of others, or to allow himself to be interrupted by them when his mind is preoccupied with the consideration of some large scheme, though the scheme may be one for the

benefiting of others. A picture was exhibited some time ago in which the painter sought to illustrate this tendency in human nature to lose sight of the wants of the individual whilst the mind is absorbed in the consideration of the needs of a multitude. In the foreground of the picture are represented steps leading up to a palatial house. The owner is standing at the door, having forcibly ejected a poor, ragged man, to whom, with an indignant expression on his face, he is addressing these words: "Wretch! how dare you interrupt me with the tale of your miserable wife and starving children, when I was in the act of devising a scheme for the help and amelioration of the whole human race?"

The picture expresses the limitations of the average man and the difficulty which he experiences in combining sympathy for the individual with universal philanthropy. Its lesson is the same as that which Dickens sought to teach by his famous description of Mrs. Jellaby, who was overcome with passionate enthusiasm for the natives of Borioboolagar, whilst her numerous family were left to grow up as heathen in her own house.

There are several scenes in the story of Christ's life that afford illustrations of His sympathy for individuals, which was shown, not merely by the exercise of miraculous power, but by forethought and consideration for their needs. One such example is given by all three of the Synoptic Gospels. On the return of Christ on one occasion to the western side of the Lake of Galilee the multitude receive Him, for they are all waiting for Him. At the urgent request, however, of a man named Jairus, or of messengers sent by him, Jesus rises and leaves the crowd in order to attend to the wants of the individual. On His way to the house a woman, who had had an issue of blood for twelve

years, comes behind Him in the crowd and, touching His garment in the spirit of faith, is immediately cured. Jesus, who knew at once what had happened, and who did not wish the woman to go away with a material blessing only, but desired to bestow upon her a higher and spiritual blessing, turned round, and, with a loving sympathy for the modesty and bashfulness of the woman, who was half ashamed of what she had done, drew from her, by means of an indirect question, a confession of the benefit which she had received. Her act of public confession made it possible for Him to bestow upon her the higher gift, the spiritual benediction with which He sent her away. It is easy to imagine how hard Jairus must have found it to repress his impatience at the delay which this interruption caused. When first Jesus had been summoned, his daughter was already at the point of death, and the minutes must have seemed to him hours which intervened between the sending of the message and the coming of Christ. His fears would have seemed justified when, as Christ was still speaking, a message was brought from his house: "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?" A second illustration of Christ's sympathy is then afforded. He knew that He was about to raise the child to life, and that the present sorrow would soon be turned into joy; but His sympathy with Jairus was so strong that He would not leave him in despair even for a few minutes, and turning to him spoke the words of comfort, "Fear not: only believe". On arriving at the house the sound of the hired mourners (a sound which is still to be heard daily in the East) must have brought back the father's anxiety. Once again the sympathy of Christ is shown by the words which He utters, words of still more certain import and comfort: "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth",

Christ's reason for turning the crowd and the hired mourners out of the house may have been due in part to His unwillingness to allow the sight of the miracle He was about to perform to serve as a sign to the sceptical and irreverent ; but an equally obvious explanation is suggested by His consideration for the girl who was dead. She was about to be brought back from that mysterious bourn from which so few have returned, and it would only be natural that, on first reawakening to earthly life, everything which met her sight would seem strange and fearful. The loving forethought of Christ provided that on first reopening her eyes she should see around her either her father and mother whom she knew so well, or Him whose face must have reflected something of the love of which His life was so full. Therefore it was that the strange, unsympathetic faces of the crowd, and of the professional weepers, were kept at a distance, and that Jesus suffered no man save the father and the mother and His three most sympathetic disciples to enter with Him.

There is one further detail in the story which illustrates the sympathy of Christ. When the miracle was performed, and the damsel was brought back to life, Christ's thoughtful care was shown by the direction which He immediately gave, that something should be given her to eat. The suggestion, simple as it seems, was one which would very likely never have occurred to the parents in the excitement of seeing their child restored to life. Nothing, too, would so readily bring back to her the associations of her old life, nothing so certainly convince her parents of the reality of her restoration to it, as the taking and eating of food. When His disciples later on doubted the reality of His own return to life this was the sign and proof which He gave them.

This story is one out of several which illustrate the tender sympathy and forethought of Christ in the little details of human life. The appreciation of this sympathy increases as the recorded incidents in His life are studied one by one. As this is done the conviction grows upon the mind that He, whose teaching was so far beyond that of His contemporaries that the wisest men to-day are very little nearer appreciating its full significance than were the men of His own time, was, nevertheless, able to sympathise with the sorrows, the difficulties, and the weaknesses of those around Him, even as though He had been in every respect one of themselves. And yet all the time that He was going about mixing with the ignorant peasants, and showing His sympathy for them, He was working out a plan more far-reaching and wonderful than any which ever entered the mind of teacher, legislator, or philosopher. It might well have been imagined that one whose thoughts were constantly dwelling upon themes with which those around Him were unable to sympathise, would have found it impossible to brook constant interruption, or to sympathise with the trifling difficulties of others. The fact that two such opposite features are perfectly combined in the Gospel portrait of Christ contributes no inconsiderable evidence in support of its superhuman origin.

2. We notice next how, in the life of Christ, as it is pictured in the Gospels, an entire *absence of excitement*, haste, or impatience is *combined with the consciousness that His message had been rejected* by his fellow-countrymen, and that He was regarded by them, or at least by their representatives, as an impostor. In ordinary experience the sense of failure invariably gives rise to impatience. And yet, as we gaze upon this portrait, we see one who, though

fully aware that the work which He had begun would almost immediately be interrupted by His own death, never once displays a sign of haste or impatience. His plans, as He gradually reveals them to a select few, are such that for their accomplishment the longest lifetime would not suffice. Centuries, thousands of years, nay, even time itself, would be insufficient. His mission, as interpreted by Himself, has for its object the setting up of the Kingdom of God upon earth, and the moral transformation of the whole human race ; but such is His sublime confidence in the success of His plan that He is prepared to lay down His life to inaugurate the fulfilment of His purpose, and this before even His own disciples have satisfactorily understood the significance of His work.

Fanatics and enthusiasts have arisen, both before and since the time of Christ, who have devised far-reaching schemes, and have prophesied the triumph of these over all opposition ; but which of them has been found willing to see his plans end in ignominious failure, to be pronounced mad by his relations, and to be put to death as a traitor to his country, without ever showing impatience, or appearing to regard his life as having been other than a complete success ?

The strangeness of this combination becomes the more impressive the longer it is studied. Let us look, for example, at the first thirty years of Christ's life. There were evils all around Him crying aloud for redress ; sin which He had come to destroy existed then to just the same extent as it afterwards did ; the hypocrisy, extortion and cruelty which He was afterwards to denounce, remained unchecked ; moreover, thousands were dying day by day in ignorance of the knowledge which He had come to impart. And yet, day after day, month after month, year after year,

He went quietly on with the occupation of an ordinary village carpenter, content to wait till the time for the commencement of His public ministry should arrive. And when at last the time comes, how completely free from every trace of haste or excitement are His acts and movements! How prepared He is to submit to almost ceaseless interruption, how willing to spend His time in talking to single individuals, whether intelligent questioners, such as Nicodemus, or simple, ignorant people in the country, such as the woman of Samaria! His composure is never ruffled either by dulness of comprehension on the part of His followers or by the contradiction of His opponents. He displays no anxiety for the success of His cause, because He never regards its failure as conceivable. The description given of Him as lying asleep amidst the storm on the Galilean lake is suggestive of the divine repose which characterised His whole life.

3. Once again we have in the character of Christ a *combination of unequalled courage with a meekness* which was then universally associated with cowardice and weakness. Other features of Christ's character are frequently dwelt upon, but it is seldom realised how great was the courage which His life displayed. The highest form of courage is not that displayed by a man who, in a sudden crisis or in a moment of blind enthusiasm, is ready to run all risks, and to sacrifice his life for any person or cause. This is a kind of courage which many possess. The highest form of courage that it is possible to imagine is that of a man who, clearly foreseeing the final issue of the course he proposes to adopt, foreseeing, for example, that it will alienate from him the sympathy of those he loves, that it will cause him to be misunderstood and misrepresented by almost everyone, and that it will lead at last to a death of utmost ig-

nominy and pain, nevertheless continues unwavering on his course. Such was the courage of Christ who persevered, though His relations called Him mad, though His own followers misunderstood Him, and though their rulers opposed Him in every possible way, till at length, as His life was about to close in apparently complete failure, He could speak the words of unhesitating triumph : " I have overcome the world ". This courage was combined—in a way which had never before been known, and which, had we not His life to point to, would have been regarded as impossible—with a meekness, a willingness to suffer wrong, and a refusal to assert His just claims. Even now, though Christianity has greatly altered the world's standard, the combination remains unparalleled within the limits of human experience.

III.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST: THE FINAL ARGUMENT FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY (*continued*).

IT remains to consider some contrasts in the Gospel portraiture of Christ which are suggested by His recorded teaching rather than by His actions.

1. Christ lived amongst a people who were more completely bound down to the traditions of the past, and who had less respect for living authority, than any other people that has ever existed. Never was a nation so devoid of moral initiative and inspiration. But, this fact notwithstanding, *the teaching* ascribed to the carpenter of the obscure village of Nazareth is admittedly *original*, that is, independent of the surroundings under which He had been brought up, and of the teaching which He must have received. Those who have sought to account for this on ordinary historical principles, have searched all the available literature which then existed—from Italy in the west, to India and China in the east—in order to discover a source from which He could conceivably have borrowed any material portion of His teaching. These attempts have so completely failed that they are now seldom made by any serious critic.

Speaking, as He did, to a people to whom the authority of the past was everything, He deliberately rejects all precedents that might suggest themselves to the minds of

His audience, and speaking with an authority which received not witness from men, He repeats again and again, "It was said to them of olden time" . . . or "by them of olden time" . . . but, "*I say unto you*". The originality of His teaching is moreover greatly enhanced by the fact that the substance of it was in direct contradiction to the most cherished hopes and the universal expectation of His people in regard to the character of their expected Messiah. His teaching was to them one long series of disappointments. Their idea of what the expected Messiah would do was that He should first of all restore their independence, and should give to them a position not only amongst but above all the surrounding nations. Submitting, as they had done, with impatience, to pay tribute to a foreign power, they had looked forward with passionate eagerness to the time when the Kingdom of God, as they understood that expression, should be established amongst them. When, then, Christ appears and begins His preaching with the announcement that this long-looked-for Kingdom is at hand, and, furthermore, works miracles in support of the truth of His announcement, He is at first received with enthusiasm born of long expectancy. Multitudes, whom no house can contain, gather to Him from far and near. Accompanied by them He resorts to the mountain side, and begins to expound the nature of the kingdom which He had come to establish. Almost every sentence He utters must have been a bitter disappointment to their hopes and national pride. He speaks, it is true, of a kingdom, of one, too, which will supersede and outlast all other kingdoms; but entrance into it is not a matter of national privilege, but is offered to Jew and Gentile alike; nay, as He afterwards more fully explains, many should come from the

East and from the West, and should take their places in it, whilst the children of the national Jewish kingdom should be cast out. He speaks at length of the blessings to be granted to the members of the kingdom, but these members are described, not as being great or learned, or as men of position or rank, but as poor, humble, meek, lowly and despised. He speaks of the coming conquests to be gained, but says not a word of casting off the foreign yoke which pressed so heavily upon the land; on the contrary, He refers to the duty of paying taxes, and goes so far as to draw a parallel between the obligation to render tribute to Cæsar and that of rendering honour to God. As His hearers gradually understand His teaching, His explanation of His announcement—"the kingdom of heaven is at hand"—seems to many of them a bitter mockery of their expectations. Later on, when they want to employ force in order to make Him their king, He promptly rejects the proposal, and disappears in order to prevent their repeating it. The bitter disappointment of the representatives of the nation at the non-fulfilment of their hopes is reflected in the words placed by Pilate on the cross, though to the actual form of them they object, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews".

Further, the teaching of Christ is at least as original from a heathen as from a Jewish standpoint. A comparison of the characteristic points of His teaching with the different philosophies and religions of His day serves but to enhance the impression of the originality of that teaching. The history of the past affords no semblance of a parallel to the combination of the narrow surroundings of Christ's life, and the all-embracing width of His teaching.

2. We notice next the *combination of strictness and laxity* which characterised Christ's teaching. An example

is afforded by His attitude towards the Mosaic law. On one occasion He says: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil".¹ On another occasion He declares that His teaching is so far incompatible with the teaching of the past that the attempt to combine the two might fitly be compared to the action of a man who should put new wine into an old wine skin, both being destroyed as the result. On the one hand we have His statement: "Till heaven and earth pass away one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished".² On the other hand we find Him claiming to supersede, on His own authority, one statement after another contained in this law. Five times in succession He says: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . but I say". In each case the principle which He proceeds to enunciate supersedes the law previously given. We understand how it is that latitudinarian and puritan have each in turn claimed to deduce their distinctive teaching from that of Christ. The latitudinarian reminds us that Christ set an example of refusing to conform to some of the most strictly observed religious customs of His day; that He told the woman of Samaria that sacred sites or buildings were not essential accompaniments of true worship; that He rebuked even His own disciples for supposing that no mighty work could be rightly performed except by those who were prepared to become His followers; and that He insisted on regarding as His friends all who were not definitely hostile, expressing this principle in words applicable to all time, "He that is not against us is for us".³

The puritan, on the other hand, reminds us that Christ said, when speaking to His disciples concerning the Scribes

¹ St. Matt. v. 17.

² *Ib.* v. 18.

³ St. Mark ix. 40.

and Pharisees, "All things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe";¹ that He declared that "Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it";² and that He demanded of all active union with Himself, and gave utterance to this demand in the formal saying, which sounds strangely contradictory to that before quoted, "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth".³

And yet, self-contradictory as Christ's teaching appears when different parts of it are thus placed side by side, the wonderful thing is that few serious students of the Gospels, whatever conclusions they form in regard to Christ, would dream of charging Him as a teacher with radical inconsistencies. The seeming contradictions, such as the painter of an imaginary portrait would have carefully avoided, serve on closer examination to deepen the conviction that this character is as authentic as it is unique.

3. Another combination closely allied to the one which has just been considered, namely that of *gentleness* and *severity*, is illustrated both by the teaching and character of Christ. Of the teachers of the past, whose sayings have been preserved, Mohammed would be regarded by most as the type of unrelenting severity, and yet we may search the Koran from beginning to end without finding words expressive of more vehement condemnation than those attributed to Christ and addressed by Him to the chief religious teachers of His day. We note, for instance, such statements as these: "Woe unto you . . . hypocrites, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves";⁴ or again, "Ye are full of hypocrisy

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 3.

² *Ib.* vii. 14.

³ *Ib.* xii. 30.

⁴ *Ib.* xxiii. 15.

and iniquity . . . ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell";¹ or, once more, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do".² To realise the significance of these words and of others of a similar kind attributed to Him in the Gospels, we must remember that they were the words of one who was a young man, little more than thirty years old, and were addressed, for the most part, to men whose hairs had begun to turn grey before He was born, and whose whole life had been spent in the study of what He, equally with them, admitted to be the Word of God. Even apart from the special circumstances under which they were spoken, which serve to enhance their severity, many of Christ's sayings strike upon our ears to-day with a startling sound. Could any words be more severe than those in which he denounced the man who should dare to mislead a little child? "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea."³ It is hard to conceive that words such as these were spoken by the gentlest and most loving man who ever trod this earth.⁴ And, yet incongruous as it may well appear, the claim to have been the gentlest and most loving of men is tacitly put forward on Christ's behalf by the writers of the Gospels on almost every page of their narrative. Let us take but two illustrations. Was ever rebuke so gently administered as that implied, rather than expressed, in Christ's thrice-repeated question to the disciple who had

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 28, 33. ² St. John viii. 44. ³ St. Matt. xviii. 6.

⁴ The combination of the two characteristics is found in the significant expression contained in the Apocalypse "the wrath of the Lamb," Rev. vi. 16.

denied Him? Did ever anyone permit a kiss to be implanted upon his forehead by the man who, as he knew, had come to betray him to a cruel death, or accompany the permission with the veiled remonstrance, "Friend, do that for which thou art come"?

4. We notice next, in the description given us of the character of Christ, the combination of an *appreciation of Woman*, and, more especially, of the dignity and claims of a married woman, with a *demand to receive* for Himself *love surpassing and superseding the love of husband for wife*, and with at least an implied suggestion that the whole question of marriage could only be considered by His disciples in subordination to the requirements of His service. Let us consider first Christ's appreciation of Woman.

"The female sex," says a writer before quoted, "in which antiquity saw nothing but inferiority, which Plato considered intended to do the same things as the male, only not so well, was understood for the first time by Christ. His treatment brought out its characteristics, its superiorities, its peculiar power of gratitude and self-devotion."¹ Christ by His teaching and by His dealing with women has raised the status of Woman, wherever the influence of Christianity has been directly or indirectly felt. The effect of His teaching in regard to the inviolability of marriage and the position of Woman as wife has been incalculable.

One of the most striking features of Christ's methods of teaching was His refusal to suggest rules, or to lay down regulations of any kind for the guidance of His followers. Even in cases where such direction seemed to be specially needed, it was generally withheld. We should have antici-

¹ *Ecce Homo*, p. 233.

pated that He would have given definite instructions¹ as to the form of Christian worship which He desired to see adopted, or as to the amount of almsgiving or the degree of fasting which He expected of His disciples. We should certainly have expected that He would have provided a solution of the more pressing social problems of His time, or that He would have forbidden the keeping of slaves or recourse to the civil law by Christians. But we search the Gospels in vain for any code of laws or restrictions. The attempt to find such in the Sermon on the Mount, that is, to interpret it as though its sayings could be literally applied to all time, without any adaptation to circumstance, has led to the most unsatisfactory results. So far as general law is embodied in Christ's teaching, it is for the most part what lawyers call "case law". Just as the lawyer of today is learning, more and more, to be guided by case law as opposed to statute law, so must it be with the Christian student. It is not by giving to particular sayings of Christ a wider application than they were originally intended to bear, but by a close study of His dealings with individuals in view of their special circumstances, that we can hope to arrive at the principles which must regulate our life and action.

"The study of the Gospels calls for common sense . . . the very essence of its interpretation lies in the discernment . . . of the general habit of the teacher. . . . The study of the law has been of late in a great degree transformed by the introduction of what is known as the case-system. Instead of lectures on the fundamental principles of jurisprudence, the learner is now confronted with de-

¹*i.e.*, instructions of a more elaborate character than those which are implied in the direction to use the "Lord's Prayer," and in the institution of the Eucharist.

tached and genuine cases, from scrutinising which, in their likeness and variations, he is encouraged to deduce the principles they combine to illustrate. Something like this is the method in which are communicated the principles of the teaching of Jesus. They are not unfolded in a philosophical system, but are involved in the treatment of specific cases, and to the observant student this occasionalism of the teaching of Jesus is precisely what gives it a perennial freshness, vitality and force.”¹

There is, however, one instance in which Christ departed from His general refusal to lay down particular laws, and which is the more striking because it stands practically alone. On the question of marriage and the obligations which it involved, He gave strict and precise directions, which, as His words imply, were intended to regulate the action of His followers for all time and under all possible circumstances. The regulations which He gave, moreover, ran counter to the opinion of His own and of all previous time. A married woman's position was never so precarious as it was in the time of Christ. In Greece and Italy divorce would seem to have been the rule, rather than the exception. Nor were matters very much better in Palestine. “The Jewish law,” says Edersheim, “unquestionably allowed divorce on almost any ground, the difference between the two schools being, not as to what was lawful, but on what grounds a man should set the law in motion and make use of the absolute liberty which is accorded him. . . . A troublesome or quarrelsome wife might certainly be sent away, and ill-repute or childlessness during ten years was also regarded as a valid ground of divorce.”² It is hard to realise how

¹ F. G. Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, pp. 81-83.

² *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i, pp. 333 et seq.

revolutionary Christ's statements must have sounded to those who had been led to suppose that this teaching was not inconsistent with the law of Moses. Few students of history would deny that Christ, by His declaration of the indissolubility of marriage and of the original and therefore fundamental equality of man and woman, has done more to raise the position of married women, and, by implication, of all women, than anyone who has lived before or since.

A careful study of Christ's intercourse with women, with the woman at the well of Sychar, with Mary and Martha, whom He "loved," with the prostitute who dared to face the public gaze and disapproval in order to show her affection for Him whom she had learned to love, with her to whom He addressed the words of loving absolution "Neither do I condemn thee," or with the other women whose relations with Him are recorded, affords abundant proof that He, who was Himself neither husband nor father, whose relations with His sisters, if indeed He had sisters in the ordinary sense of the word, are clouded in obscurity, possessed a power of understanding and of sympathising with women, such as none other amongst the great teachers of the world has possessed. And yet this appreciation of Woman and of womanly characteristics was combined with teaching which, had we not the Gospel record before us, we should have regarded as impossible to attribute to the same character, without creating an impression of incongruity. In the very passage, for example, in which we read that, by the act of marriage, man and woman become "one flesh," we read also Christ's apparent endorsement of His disciples' exclamation, "It is not good to marry," when He said, "All men cannot receive this saying, but they to whom it is

given".¹ As we listen to His words, uttered on another occasion, we might well imagine that we were listening to one who was prepared to disparage or even repudiate the marriage bond altogether. For when, as St. Luke says, "there went with him great multitudes," He turned and said unto them, "If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father and mother and wife . . . he cannot be my disciple."² On yet another occasion He said, "There is no man that hath left . . . wife . . . for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life."³

It is not only in Christ's teaching, but in His character as illustrated by His actions, that we may trace the same wonderful combination. We see in His character, as in that of none other, "manhood fused with female grace"; we see tender and affectionate sympathy combined with rigid and masculine austerity. The womanly tears, which He is described as shedding over the tomb of Lazarus and over the city of Jerusalem, are the tears of one who forbade the women of Jerusalem to weep on His own behalf, and who sternly rebuked His apostle, who had suggested that He should avoid His predicted death. St. Paul in one instance appeals to his fellow-Christians "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ".⁴ In another he bids them become partakers of His self-sacrifice and courage, Who "humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the

¹ St. Matt. xix. 3-12.

² St. Luke xiv. 25 *et seq.* "A member of the Society of Friends recently said in an address, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,' not because he loved his parents too much, but *not enough*. Perfect love makes the love freer and more able for high tasks even when those tasks involve absence from the beloved."—Cf. Bengel, "non spernit matrem sed anteposit Patrem." St. Matt. xii. 41.

³ St. Luke xviii. 29 *et seq.* ⁴ 2 Cor. x. 1.

death of the cross".¹ In the character of Christ portrayed in the Gospels are perfectly united the gentleness and grace characteristic of the woman, and the resolution and perseverance which belong to the man. In interpreting the expression "Son of Man," which He so often applied to Himself, we do not need a knowledge of Greek to tell us that the word Man is far from being equivalent to male. The thought suggested in the refrain, "Jesu, Son of Mary, hear," which is a true echo of the teaching of the Gospels, is that in Him is to be found all that is tender and compassionate in human nature. St. Paul shows how fully he had understood the teaching of his Master when he says in his letter to the Galatians, "there can be no male and female, for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus".²

The adoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an adoration which could not have arisen as the outcome of any religion other than Christianity, and which is itself a testimony to the height to which the teaching of Christ has raised the female sex, has resulted from a failure to enter into the meaning of the revelation contained in the title "Son of Man". It is only as he can show to men that they may find in Christ all that the Roman Catholics find in the Blessed Virgin Mary that any one can hope, or wish, to supplant the devotion which thus finds its only mode of expression.

5. We notice next in the Gospel description of Christ, the combination of a persistent *optimism* with a consciousness of the heinousness of sin, and an oppressive sense of impending evil, such as would naturally have produced the lowest *pessimism*. Though, as St. John says, "He needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man, for he himself knew what was in man";³ though He under-

¹ Phil. ii. 8.

² Gal. iii. 28.

³ St. John ii. 25.

stood the treachery and sin of the human heart better than any of His contemporaries, so far was this knowledge from producing in Him anything like misanthropy, that He was constantly detecting good and giving men credit for good, which, though it proved in the issue to have a real existence, was so far obliterated that nothing short of omniscient love could have discovered it. He could recognise possibilities of good in the prostitute, the thief, or the despised and often despicable publicans, one of whom He called to be His apostle, whilst He invited another to entertain Him in his own house. Even in the presence of flagrant and irretrievable sin, He could anticipate a future of purity and goodness, as may be seen from His words to the woman taken in adultery, "neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more".¹

A Persian legend, to which Goethe alludes, so beautifully illustrates this trait in Christ's character that it might well be true. According to the legend, Jesus arrived one evening at the gates of a certain city and sent His disciples forward to prepare supper, while He Himself, intent on doing good, walked through the streets into the marketplace. He saw at the corner of it some people gathered together, looking at an object on the ground, and He drew near to see what it might be. It proved to be a dead dog, with a halter round its neck, by which it appeared to have been dragged through the dirt, and a viler, a more abject, a more unclean thing, never met the eyes of man. "Faugh," said one, stopping his nose, "it pollutes the air." "How long," said another, "shall this foul beast offend our sight?" "Look at his torn hide," said a third, "one could not even cut a shoe out of it." "And his ears," said a fourth, "all dragged and bleeding." "No doubt,"

¹ St. John viii. 11.

said a fifth, "he has been hanged for thieving." And Jesus heard them, and looking down compassionately on the dead creature, He said, " Pearls cannot equal the whiteness of his teeth". And the people turned towards Him in amazement, and said among themselves, "Who is this? This must be Jesus of Nazareth, for who else could find anything to pity or approve in a dead dog?" And being ashamed they bowed their heads before Him, and went on their way.

This habit of seeing good in things evil, which the Persian legend illustrates, was combined with an oppressive consciousness of the reality of evil, and with a vivid anticipation of the impending destruction of the Jewish state and people. So far from approving the outward and visible righteousness of the Jews, or regarding the mere abstinence from evil as an encouraging sign, He warned them that this might only indicate that the spirit of evil had gone forth, shortly to return in seven-fold force. When certain told of the cruel massacre of the Galileans by Pilate, thinking to draw from Him some expression of indignation, He replied, in words which suggest the practical abandonment of all hope, "Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish".¹ Could any teaching be more pessimistic than that contained in parables, such as that of the wicked husbandmen? Could any reply be more suggestive of gloomy forebodings than that which He gave to the "Daughters of Jerusalem," when He bade them weep not for Him and His sufferings, but for themselves and their children?

This undertone of melancholy in His estimate both of individuals and of the community was combined with the power of seeing good where no one else could see anything

¹ St. Luke xiii. 3.

but evil. It is this combination of opposite characteristics which is so striking. Many a man has professed to discern the evil of his own time and generation, and has announced what he saw to his unbelieving and persecuting contemporaries. Many another has taken an optimistic view of the evils of his time, and has regarded moral evil as a rudimentary form of good, into which it must sooner or later develop; but where else, either in history or in fiction, can we find any one in whom the two characteristics, invincible optimism and gloomy pessimism, are perfectly and naturally united?

6. (It may be urged that to prove the Gospel portrait of Christ to be both genuine and unique, or to prove that He alone was sinless in the midst of a sinful world, is not equivalent to proving that He was Divine. Other men have possessed powers which, though subject to obvious limitations, can only be described as unique, to whom the epithet Divine could certainly not be applied in the same sense as it is applied to Christ.) For example, there is no accounting for the genius of Shakespeare, Newton, Darwin or Edison. May it not be said that Christ was a spiritual genius, possessed of unique moral and spiritual powers, just as the men referred to were possessed of unique powers in their particular departments of thought or action? To admit this, however, as an explanation of Christ's character involves the acceptance of one of three assumptions. (1) That Christ claimed to be Divine in a unique sense, but was Himself mistaken; an assumption which would convict Him of ignorance in the special department of knowledge to which His unique powers confessedly belonged. (2) That Christ put forward His claims to be Divine, knowing them to be unfounded; a statement which is categorically

opposed to the admitted fact that He was morally superior to all other men. (3) That the claim to be Divine, attributed to Him in the Gospels, was introduced in later time into the story of His life, and was never put forward by Himself. But if the representation of Christ's character in the Gospels is self-consistent and the claim to be Divine, which is attributed to Him in each of them, is so inextricably interwoven with the record of His life that it cannot be dis severed from it, this explanation too is inadmissible. Thus the only reasonable explanation which is left is that Christ claimed to be Divine, that He understood the import of such a claim, and that the claim itself was a true one.)

Our belief that the revelation which Christ gave to men is trustworthy rests upon the assumption that He was Himself Divine. For "unless we believe that Jesus Christ did verily reveal the character of God, not as a good man may be thought probably to resemble God, but as an authoritative revelation of God Himself, we have no assurance of God's eternal goodness, nor a well-grounded hope of forgiveness of sins".¹

It may be well to refer here to two passages in the Gospels, which are sometimes adduced as showing that Christ Himself did not uniformly claim to be Divine. The first passage, in which He is reported as saying "None is good save one, even God,"² has been urged as a proof that He did not claim to be Himself sinless. The argument, however, rests upon a misunderstanding of the meaning which the Jews, and therefore the speaker, attached to the word *good* (ἀγαθός). To them it was practically equivalent to meritorious. In answer, then, to the question, What

¹ *Rochdale Sermons*, by Archdeacon Wilson, p. 25.

² St. Mark x. 18.

meritorious act must a man do to gain eternal life? Christ replied, in effect, Why callest thou Me meritorious? To God the Father alone is such a title due. There are several passages in the Gospels which show that Christ regarded His life-work upon earth as a duty which He owed to the Father who had sent Him. Now the recognition of duty necessarily precludes the consciousness of merit, and this quite apart from the reality of the merit. In accordance, then, with what we should naturally have expected, although Christ claimed to be sinless,¹ He never claimed to be meritorious, *i.e.* to be good, in the sense in which the Jews commonly used the word. To have made such a claim, though all subsequent generations would have eagerly endorsed it, would nevertheless have been inconsistent with the principle of surrender and obedience to His Father, by which His whole life was guided. If the purpose of His life was to do the will of God and to finish His work, it is impossible to believe that He would have allowed men to connect the thought of merit even with the most perfect fulfilment of that will.

The second passage is that in which Christ said to His disciples, "The Father is greater than I".² Now, if the Incarnation can be correctly described as a self-limitation of God, then, as long as this limitation continued, the language just quoted could be used in the most literal and natural sense. At the same time the words throw no light upon Christ's essential being or nature, for the truth they express is none other than the self-evident proposition that the unlimited Fatherhood of God is greater than Divine Humanity.

¹ St. John viii. 46.

² *Ib.*, xiv. 28. It is interesting to notice that this passage occurs in St. John, and not, as many would have expected, in the earlier Gospels,

To sum up in a few words the argument derived from the existence of the Gospel portrait of Christ which has been so far suggested ; we have in the character of Christ depicted in the Gospels one which is admitted by all to be the most perfect character that has ever been described, and one which exhibits a combination of qualities which, had we not this description before us, we should have unhesitatingly declared to have been incapable of combination.

The more closely we study this character, with its strangely contradictory features, the less surprise do we feel that all paintings of Christ are so disappointing, and that none has ever been produced which expressed what we feel and know it ought to express. Where is the painter who can adequately portray the combination—of Divine repose with strenuous activity ; of feminine gentleness and grace with masculine resolution and strength ; of intellectual majesty with unaffected simplicity of expression ; of unparalleled self-assertion with transparent humility ; of conscious power with superhuman self-restraint in the use of this power ; of ineffable dignity with sympathetic love ; of passionate enthusiasm with limitless patience ? Had we not the Gospel record before us, we should have been inclined to ask with equal confidence : Where is the writer or historian who can combine in a single portrait the characteristics which are assigned to Christ, and leave us with any other impression than that of repellent inconsistency or of a caricature of humanity ?

It has often been suggested that the life of Christ, as we now have it in the Gospels, was not copied from life, but was invented at an earlier or later period in the history of Christianity. But this supposition involves such difficulties that many who have rejected Christ's claims have been forced to admit that, apart from any external evi-

dence as to their date or authenticity, it cannot be denied that the Gospels tell the story of a real life. Thus the French critic Rousseau says: "The Gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable, that the inventor of it would be more astonishing than the hero". We have, too, the emphatic statement of John Stuart Mill, who altogether denied the Divinity of Christ; he says: "Who among the disciples of Jesus or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, as certainly not St. Paul."

The argument for the truth of Christianity may with confidence be based upon the unique character of its Founder. Against this argument objections derived from historical criticism or from the assumed impossibility of miracles avail nothing. We may accept the assertion that the Gospels are unhistorical, or that they were not written by their supposed authors; but, as we do so, we are confronted with the insoluble problem of one or more unknown writers creating and setting forth the only conception of a perfect character which the world has known. We may regard the accounts of the miracles as placing too great a strain upon our credulity; but in rejecting the lesser miracles we are left with the greatest of them all, *viz.*, the existence of the portrait of Christ, which we can neither deny nor explain. Again, nothing is more difficult, as the study alike of contemporary and past literature shows, than for any one to describe at length, still more to invent, the character of another without leaving some impress of his own prejudices and sympathies upon it. But the men who, on the supposition that the character of Christ was invented in the second century, were the originators of the

Gospel portrait, were admittedly men who belonged to the narrowest and most bigoted sect which has perhaps ever existed. The age was intensely superstitious ; many of the superstitions were shared alike by Jews and Gentiles. Some of them have taken centuries of culture and learning to dissipate. And yet we are asked to believe that some unknown Jews invented a character free from all local bias, all party prejudice, and all current superstition ; invented a character so far in advance of their own time that, though eighteen centuries of progress lie between us and them, we feel that He is almost as much in advance of our time as He was of theirs. The credulity that would enable us to accept the hypothesis that the Gospels were composed, whether, as used to be asserted, by deliberate forgers, or, as is now more frequently suggested, by honest but deluded fanatics, is a credulity to which a belief in all the fables of the Middle Ages would hardly afford a parallel.¹

¹ As a possible illustration of the limitations to which even the greatest creative genius is subject, it may be pointed out that Shakespeare never attempted to delineate a saint.

IV.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST: HOW FAR CAN IT BE DISENTANGLED FROM THEOLOGY?

THERE are certain objections that are frequently suggested when an attempt is made to use the description of the character of Christ as an argument for the reality of the original, which deserve careful consideration.

The first of these may be expressed thus :—

“The difficulty of regarding the character and conduct of Christ as an evidence of the truth of our theological system is that our estimate of His character and conduct is profoundly influenced by the very theology which it is supposed to establish. Is it possible to estimate the human character of Christ apart from our theological beliefs and assumptions respecting Him, and apart from what is known of the theological beliefs and assumptions of Christ Himself? Is not the character, even in the records themselves, so blended with theology that it cannot really be disentangled therefrom?”

In reply to the last question, it must be admitted that the character of Christ is so blended with theology that no one can form an adequate estimate of it who ignores Christ's theological assumptions or who is out of sympathy with them. Several books have been written, notably that which bears the title *Ecce Homo*, in which an attempt has been made to exhibit Christ as man, without reference to

the claims made by theology, and assumed by theologians to have been made by Himself, in regard to His person and work. Such attempts have been both valuable and interesting, but they have attained, and can attain, only a limited success. The character of the Christ of Christian theology is, in fact, inextricably interwoven with the theological beliefs and assumptions attributed to Him in the Gospels. The deduction, however, which might at first sight seem to follow from this admission, and which those who raise the above objection would suggest, does not follow as a matter of course. Because Christ's character cannot be completely disentangled from His theological beliefs, it does not follow that no one who does not start with the assumption that these were true can form a correct estimate of His character. A man may approach the consideration of these beliefs with a perfectly open mind, or may start with the assumption that they are unfounded, and still gain some true conception of Christ's character. All that he needs, in the first instance, is sufficient power of imagination to enable him to estimate the influence which Christ's religious faith must have had upon the formation of His character. Such a power of imagination would be equally necessary in estimating the character of any other person on whom religious faith had exercised a strong influence. Take, for example, the case of Mohammed. According to an old Mohammedan saying, "The character of Mohammed is the Koran". No intelligent person would think of saying that it was possible completely to disentangle Mohammed's character from the Koran, or from the beliefs and assumptions which are there attributed to him. But it does not follow that, to a man who rejects the religious beliefs of Mohammed, no correct estimate of his character is possible. Nor does it

follow that an estimate of his character formed from a perusal of his writings and those of his followers may not be treated as evidence for or against the truth of his claims. Mohammed regarded himself as raised above all other men, Christ included, and professed to have been admitted into Heaven during his lifetime on earth; but the refusal to accept these claims does not prevent our applying to his life and character the elementary standards of duty and goodness which civilised men have ever applied, apart from any theological presuppositions, to their own life and character. The same general principle applies when we attempt to estimate the life and character of Christ. We cannot help taking into account His religious assumptions and beliefs, and our estimate must vary considerably according as we start with a prepossession for or against their truth, or with an entirely unbiassed mind. But, with whatever assumptions we start, provided only that we believe Christ to have been a real man—for unless we believe this, all comparisons and estimates are impossible—there can be no *à priori* reason why His character should not appeal to us, even as Mohammed's does, as an argument for or against the validity of His claims.

The further objection (arising out of the one which has just been considered) that any argument for the truth of Christianity such as that which has been deduced from the existence of the portrait of Christ, is "infected by the vice inherent in all apologetics . . . the vice of foregone conclusions," is one which applies to all departments of knowledge, and has no special application to the present case. And although it is impossible to ignore this difficulty, it is some consolation to remember that the same vice can be attributed to all the greatest thinkers of the past, and that knowledge has never been greatly advanced by those

whose minds have been free from all positive impressions, or who have been content merely "to speculate in the void".¹

The special difficulty which attaches to the study of Christ's character, and which has made it hard for men to approach it with an open mind, is due to religious prejudice. But even this is not now as great a difficulty as it has been in the past. Any one whose faith in Christianity has been shaken, and to whom external authority has little meaning, could find no better method of resolving his doubts than by a careful and, as far as may be, an unbiassed study of the character of Christ. The study of the human character of Christ from a non-theological standpoint may prepare him to appreciate eventually the position of the theologian and the additional significance which the character of Christ possesses, if viewed from his standpoint. He will, perhaps, first learn to recognise Christ as Divine by perceiving in Him perfect manhood, and then, recognising Him as Divine, will begin to understand more completely what perfect manhood is.

The conclusion that Christ's character was superhuman or Divine was, in the minds of those who first felt His influence, an induction from their observations. The argument which has been here suggested, is that we, who have a far wider basis for our induction than they had, and who have been unable, after the minutest investigation, to find anything inconsistent with their conclusion, are constrained to accept it, although, for us who realise that law is the principle of the universe, it is a far greater effort to do so than it could ever have been for them.

There is, however, a further difficulty, implied rather than expressed, in the objection just considered, which

¹ *Foundations of Belief*, by A. J. Balfour, 8th ed., preface.

might be stated thus : " Is it not the case that, in attempting to form any estimate of the character of Christ, we perforce apply to it the standard and ideal which are distinctive of the Christian religion ; that, in other words, we estimate Christ's character by applying to it a standard which He himself created ? Does not this method of judging, though it is admittedly the only one possible in the circumstances, deprive us of the power of forming an independent or unbiassed opinion concerning Him ? " It would seem, at first sight, as though this question admits of but one answer, but when we turn from theory to experience we realise how misleading any such argument is. If we think, for example, of music, painting or any other art, how absurd would it be to say that no man's work can be correctly judged when the only standard that can be applied to it is a standard which the man himself has created ! Wagner, Turner, Wordsworth each created the standard by which his work is judged to-day. Their work was so unlike that of their predecessors that it is difficult to institute any satisfactory comparison between them and those who went before them ; but who would dream of saying that any judgment passed by their contemporaries or successors is necessarily invalidated by the impossibility of comparing their work with previous work of a similar kind ? We feel that, though their work is in a true sense original and cannot therefore be judged by the same tests as the work of their predecessors, there is that in it which, in proportion as we have been trained to appreciate the particular branch of art to which it belongs, makes its appeal to us directly and independently of conventional use or rule. We feel, moreover, that it is not impossible to judge new and independent work by the standard which the work itself creates, provided that the new stan-

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dard is in harmony with our own inherent powers of appreciation, after these have been trained and cultivated by use.

Exactly the same may be said in regard to Christ's character and work. It is true that He taught men to regard as virtues qualities which had never before been so regarded, and that He reversed, in many important points, the moral standard of His age. It is true that He laid but little stress upon traditional maxims concerning good and evil, which, even in His time, had become "the lumber of the world," and that He introduced entirely new tests for conduct and action. It is true, lastly, that, apart from His claim to pre-existence in immediate relationship with God, His whole teaching was more original than that of any other man who has lived ; but, these facts notwithstanding, we feel that the new standard which He introduced appeals so directly to our moral consciousness, as it has done to that of all generations since the time when that standard was first introduced, that it needs no further justification nor support. His teaching, for example, in regard to the nature of true greatness, in regard to humility, love, and many other qualities, has, to use the words of the objection quoted above, become part of "our theological system," but in accepting it we recognise that the teaching itself is not true because Christ taught it, but that Christ taught it because it was true.

V.

THE SELF-SACRIFICE OF CHRIST CONDITIONED BY HIS FORESIGHT.

THE objection which has just been considered is closely connected with another, which may be stated thus: "If Christ were something more than man, does not this supposition completely alter the impression which we should otherwise derive from the moral attributes that He is said to have possessed? Take, for instance, the fortitude under accumulating ills, culminating in death by torture, which is attributed to Him in the Gospel account. Theology tells us that He foresaw His death, but it tells us also that He foresaw His resurrection within three days, and His glorious ascension. Is not the scope for the exercise of fortitude greatly reduced by this supernatural foresight attributed to Him by theology? May we not see a practical recognition of this fact in the tendency of theologians to go beyond the Gospel account and to attribute to Christ on the cross a supernatural consciousness of the individual sins of all mankind, His fortitude being thus proportionate to the number of sins which men had committed, or should afterwards commit?"

The justification which the theologian would allege for basing any argument upon an assumed knowledge of the character of a God-man is that he believes that all men are in a real sense of the word God-men. In accordance with

what he believes to have been the true revelation of the Old Testament, that man was created in the image of God, he recognises the fact that, not only in Christ's nature but in the nature of every man, Divinity and humanity are intermingled.¹ The theologian believes that God by making man in His own image imparted to him something which should bridge over the otherwise impassable gulf between the Divine and the human. He believes also that Christ Jesus existed before the beginning of time, but that in time, to use the words of St. Paul, He "emptied himself . . . being made in the likeness of men".²

To any one, therefore, who starts with these assumptions, the difficulty above stated hardly presents itself as a difficulty, inasmuch as there is for him no such separation between the life of Christ and his own as would make it impossible to interpret the significance of Christ's actions in terms suggested by his own experience.

In passing on to consider the particular question as to how far the foresight attributed to Christ in the Gospels affects any claim to perfect fortitude that may be made on His behalf, it must be remembered that the foresight attributed to Him differed in extent rather than in kind from the foresight with which many other men have been accredited. To take but one example, it would not be

¹ It is sometimes urged that such a statement as this implies that Christ differed from men like Gautama, only "in degree". This is an argument often used by those who realise, what they think to be, the danger of insisting upon the Divine side of human nature. Are we, however, quite clear as to what we mean when we say that there can be "degrees" of the Divine Spirit? The attempt to found an argument, positive or negative, upon the assumption that human language can adequately express our relation to Christ or to God the Father cannot be other than dangerous and misleading.

² Phil. ii. 7.

possible to find in literature words which express more confident foresight of coming victory and triumph than some of those contained in the last half of Isaiah. Even Christ's assurances to His disciples do not surpass them in certainty and intensity.

In the case of Christ it is suggested that His vivid anticipation that His sufferings would be followed by His resurrection and ascension renders it impossible to attribute to Him the perfection of human fortitude. But it may equally be urged that the exact opposite is the truth, and that a large measure of foresight—and, as will be seen later on, Christ is not represented as having possessed complete foresight—is one of the most necessary qualifications for the possession of perfect fortitude. By fortitude is usually understood the courageous endurance of suffering, whether mental or physical. Experience shows that the worst suffering in almost every case which comes to any one comes to him by anticipation.

If Christ's life were intended to afford an example of unique fortitude, He must needs have possessed exceptional foresight of His coming sufferings. It is true that this foresight would have enabled him to look beyond these sufferings, but any alleviation of them, which the anticipation of personal triumph might be supposed to produce, must have been terribly diminished by His foresight of what would happen after His death to those whom He loved most on earth.

For the greatest suffering which an unselfish man can experience is not the anticipation, still less the endurance, of personal anguish, but it is the anticipation that he will be the indirect cause of bringing suffering to those whom he loves. Many a good man when in the act of dying has been more concerned with the question how his death will

affect those whom he loves than with that of the immediate future in store for himself. We are expressly told that Christ foresaw that the result of His work would be, not to send peace upon earth, but a sword, and that the most intimate family relationships would be violated as the direct result of His teaching.¹ Nor, again, did He foresee in the case of all others, as in His own case, that sorrow would eventually give place to joy. On the contrary, He foresaw that one of His disciples would act in such a way that it would have been good for him had he never been born. He foresaw the possibility of men committing an "eternal sin" ² that could never be forgiven. He foresaw that His warnings of coming judgment would remain unheeded by His fellow-countrymen, and that the city in which He had taught, and which He dearly loved, would be utterly destroyed.

Once more, if we may believe Christ to have possessed any clear foresight of the actions and conduct of those who should become His nominal followers, it becomes hard to place any limit upon the suffering which this foresight must have caused Him.

Face, loved of little children long ago !
Head, hated by the priests and rulers then !
Say, was not this Thy passion to foreknow
In Thy last hour the deeds of Christian men ?

The more the scope and application of Christ's foresight is considered, the more likely it seems that it tended to increase rather than to decrease the suffering which He endured.

The consideration of one or two special cases in which the fortitude of Christ was exhibited may help to throw light upon its nature. Let us take, for example, a story to

¹ St. Matt. x. 34 *et seq.*

² St. Mark iii. 29.

which reference has already been made.¹ We do not understand any of the details of the temptation attributed to Christ, nor whether the scenes described were visibly enacted or were subjective experiences. But this at least is clear. Christ became conscious of a temptation to secure the immediate triumph of the kingdom of God at the cost of a momentary compromise with evil, and without the long and arduous struggle which the foresight that He then possessed caused Him to anticipate. That the temptation was a real one we know on the authority of Christ Himself, from whom alone the account could have come. If, as most modern critics suppose, it came to Him as a subjective experience, the fact of its impressing itself upon His consciousness proves that a real effort was made to resist it. As we look back, with the knowledge we possess of the issue of His life, it is hard to over-estimate the courage which was displayed in the deliberate choice of a life of suffering, hardship and death when, as it seemed, a doubtful compromise with evil would have avoided all.

Let us take another scene, the circumstances of which it is easier to understand. In St. Luke we read that "when the days were well nigh come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem".² Earlier in the same chapter we have an account given of the Transfiguration, a vision witnessed, apparently, at night, on the summit of a hill by Christ and three of His disciples. In the course of the vision two Old Testament saints, who were held in high honour among the Jews, appear and converse with Christ upon His approaching death at Jerusalem. When, then, we are told that "He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," we realise that He must have done so in full view of what was about to happen. He is a brave

¹ P. 10.

² S. Luke ix. 51.

man who in a moment of sudden peril will cast aside all thought of personal danger, and act as though the peril did not exist, but his is courage of a far higher order who, conscious long beforehand of approaching danger, or of death, without attempting to shut his eyes to that which is before him, or to minimise to himself the danger he is incurring, keeps on his way undaunted and unmoved. This is the highest form of courage, and this is the courage attributed to Christ. When He commenced this last journey to Jerusalem He was conscious, as His words to His disciples immediately afterwards show, that He was entering upon a struggle which could end only with His death, or rather which, so far from ending with His death, would entail an inheritance of suffering upon His disciples as long as time should last. To initiate such a struggle required a fortitude different altogether from that which has often claimed the name. The contrast between the fortitude of Christ and that of the man to whom the title *brave* is usually given, corresponds with the contrast which Ruskin points out between Fortitude as represented by Botticelli and by other masters. He says:—

“What is chiefly notable in her [*i.e.*, Botticelli’s Fortitude] is that you would not, if you had to guess who she was, take her for Fortitude at all. Everybody else’s Fortitudes announce themselves clearly and proudly. They have tower-like shields and lion-like helmets, and stand firm astride on their legs, and are confidently ready for all comers. Yes, that is your common Fortitude. Very grand, though common. But not the highest by any means. . . . But Botticelli’s Fortitude is no match, it may be, for any that are coming. Worn somewhat, and not a little weary, instead of standing ready for all comers, she is sitting apparently in reverie, her fingers playing restlessly and idly—

nay, I think even nervously—about the hilt of her sword. For her battle is not to begin to-day, nor did it begin yesterday. Many a morn and eve have passed since it began, and now is this to be the ending day of it? and if this, by what manner of end?”¹

One more instance may be suggested in which Christ's foresight may reasonably be supposed to have increased His actual sufferings. The scene which more than any other—more even than the final scene on Calvary—illustrates His courage and fortitude is that which is usually called The Agony.

In the description which is given of this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, we have clearer indications of the extent and of the limits of Christ's foresight than are anywhere else afforded. We are told that He foresaw not only that He would be deserted by all His disciples, but that He would be betrayed by one of them into the hands of His enemies. As in the two former instances, so here, the foresight which is attributed to Him by His biographers gave to His sufferings an entirely voluntary aspect. When He left Jerusalem on the Thursday night and turned His steps towards the garden by the side of the Kedron, He refused, of set purpose, to avoid the machinations of His enemies which, He knew, were in the act of being completed. But whilst, on the one hand, He possessed sufficient foresight to increase by anticipation the sufferings which awaited Him, on the other hand, this foresight was very far from being absolute or unlimited. The words, which He is reported to have uttered in the garden, prove beyond all doubt that He did not clearly know what would happen, and that, up to almost the last moment, He conceived the possibility of an issue other than the one which

¹ *Mornings in Florence*, pp. 57 et seq.

He greatly dreaded. The prayer addressed to God, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee : remove this cup from me," with its undertone of brave submission, "Howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt,"¹ is the prayer, not of one sustained by superhuman foresight, but of a man conscious of human limitations, conscious too, amidst the horror of great darkness, that his bodily frame was unequal to the dread struggle to which the will of God was leading Him on. How incomplete would our knowledge of the character of Christ have been if the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane had been omitted from the Gospel story ! For to study aright His character, we need to know that the calm of His spirit was not always unruffled or unbroken. He, at whose word the demons are reported to have fled, now shrinks in horror from "the power of darkness". He, who could sleep calmly amidst nature's tempest, fears as He reaches the brink of the unknown future, and would escape, were it possible, the threatening storm. He, whose sympathy with those in need was never known to fail, conscious of His own need of sympathy, appeals, but appeals in vain, to those from whom He has most right to expect it.

Yet one further instance of the apparent limitations attaching to His foresight is afforded by the words attributed to Him upon the cross. His cry of anguish, shortly before His death, if the words are taken in their literal sense, shows that His vision of the immediate future had been, for the time at least, entirely obscured.

But to revert to the actual words of the objection we have been considering, "Theology tells us that Christ foresaw not only His death, but His speedy resurrection within three days". This fact, if it be a fact, is the clearest instance of His foresight recorded in the Gospels. But before using it

¹ St. Mark xiv. 36.

as an argument in favour of the hypothesis that Christ's foresight was of a different order to that which has been possessed by other men, it is well to be sure that the Gospel narrative necessitates this conclusion. If we confine our attention to the actual words attributed to Christ Himself, we shall see that on two separate occasions He foretold His own resurrection in or after three days. When "certain of the Scribes and Pharisees" said to Him, "Master, we would see a sign from thee," He replied, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".¹ According to the Gospel record the actual time spent by Christ in the tomb was about thirty-six hours. If, then, these words are correctly attributed to Him, and if His prophecy was a true one, the only possible explanation seems to be that the expression three days and three nights was used by Him to denote a brief but indefinite space of time. The numbers three, seven and ten were often used by the Jews when no exact enumeration was intended. Thus in Hannah's song she declares, speaking of herself, "the barren hath borne seven"; but the history which follows tells us that the number of her children was six: the obvious explanation being that "seven" is here used to express an indefinite number.

Another instance in which Christ is represented as foretelling His resurrection after, or within, three days is referred to by St. Mark and St. John.² Speaking of the temple of His body, as St. John tells us, He said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". In this case Christ's enemies are supposed to have interpreted the words "three days" in a literal sense, inasmuch as they after-

¹ St. Matt. xii. 38, 40.

² St. Mark xiv. 58; St. John ii. 19-21.

wards said to Pilate, "We remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again".¹ Assuming their statement to have been based upon these words, and not, as is at least equally likely, upon the passage which has been already considered, we should still hesitate to insist that the men, who so long misunderstood the sense in which Christ used the word "temple," must be accepted as interpreters to us of what He meant by the word "three". We are only concerned now with the interpretation put upon Christ's words, whether by His disciples or by His enemies, in so far as they may help us to understand what He Himself meant; and the fact that they interpreted certain of His sayings literally cannot preclude the possibility of our admitting any other interpretation that is not inconsistent with the general tenor of His teaching. On a third occasion, which is referred to by each of the three synoptists, St. Mark states that He foretold His resurrection "after three days,"² whilst St. Matthew and St. Luke say that He foretold it on "the third day".³ If, as is generally supposed, in cases where such variations occur in the synoptic Gospels, St. Mark represents the actual words used, the expression "after three days" corresponds to the statement attributed by St. Matthew to Christ in connection with the reference to Jonah.

A further instance in which Christ Himself used the expression "the third day," where it is obvious that the words cannot be interpreted literally, is given by St. Luke. When the Pharisees warned Him that Herod desired to kill Him, He replied, "Behold, I cast out devils and perform cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am perfected".⁴ The expression "third day" was evidently used

¹ St. Matt. xxvii. 63.

² St. Mark viii. 31.

³ St. Matt. xvi. 21; St. Luke ix. 22.

⁴ St. Luke xiii. 32.

in a proverbial way to denote a comparatively short space of time. In this case it meant at least a week.

We do not for a moment suggest that Christ may not have possessed the knowledge that in three days, or rather in a day and a half, He would rise again from the dead, but the evidence afforded by His own recorded sayings is not sufficiently strong to admit of any argument being founded upon it in favour of an extension of His foresight beyond the limits suggested by the rest of the Gospel narrative.

When we try to compare the fortitude of Christ with that of other men, we realise how difficult is the task set before us. For a man's fortitude in bearing pain is proportionate, not to the apparent suffering inflicted, but to his sensitiveness—that is, to his capacity for feeling pain. And just as the power of sympathy is the index to a man's capacity for suffering, so there can be no real comparison between the suffering which a sympathetic and a callous man will endure under the same outward conditions. A Chinaman, for example, has been known to sit in his chair and smoke his cigar while his leg was being amputated, and others have allowed themselves to be hacked limb from limb without exhibiting any outward sign of distress. But no one would think of selecting a Chinaman as an example of the highest fortitude. We feel in a case such as his that, as the worst forms of suffering lie outside his experience, so the highest fortitude is a virtue which he can never attain until he has also attained a sympathy and a refinement which he does not now possess. The principle illustrated by this example is one which must constantly be kept in mind in considering the sufferings and the fortitude of Christ. It holds good, too, of moral as well as of physical suffering. For the suffering which arises from

moral as distinguished from physical causes varies in each case according as the moral standard of the individual varies. A man's fortitude in enduring the near approach of moral evil is proportionate to his instinctive shrinking from sin. To a thoroughly debased and selfish man moral fortitude would be an impossible virtue. In proportion as a man is pure and unselfish will be the fortitude required of him for the voluntary endurance of close contact with evil. The suffering which a pure woman would endure, if forcibly constrained to look upon deeds of impurity and to listen to language of a like character, may give us some idea of the intensity of the suffering which would be caused to the purest and best of mankind when brought into contact with sin in its most repulsive form.

There is one more point in the objection referred to above that has not yet been considered. "Have not theologians," it was asked, "practically admitted the difficulty, which Christ's foresight raises, in the way of recognising in Him perfect fortitude, when they have attributed to Him on the cross a supernatural consciousness of the individual sins of all mankind, and have then represented His fortitude as being proportionate to the amount of the sins to be committed in the time to come?" The answer to this question is simple. We are concerned not with theoretical explanations of Christ's death, but with the statements contained in the Gospel narrative. There is no reason to assume that Christ possessed any supernatural consciousness of the kind suggested, because the Gospel narrative gives us no hint that this was so. Moreover, even if isolated texts existed, the sense of which could be made to harmonise with such an hypothesis, any theory devised by theologians, ancient or modern, would rightly be viewed with suspicion which placed an insuperable barrier between

the experience through which Christ passed and that which is possible to all other men.

The fortitude of Christ is one of the most inspiring features of the character attributed to Him in the Gospels. As we gaze with reverent awe upon His life and, in particular, upon the scene enacted in Gethsemane, we feel that His victory is in a real sense the victory of mankind. When brought face to face with a dreaded and unknown future ; when the will of God seems so hard to accept that the flesh shrinks in horror from the sacrifice involved ; when we are tempted to lose all trust in human friendship, as the sympathy which might with right have been expected fails at the last ; when it seems, in very deed, that this is the "hour" and "the power of darkness" ;¹ then the knowledge that Christ strove and conquered as a man, under real human limitations, may prevent despair, and may help to explain the argument implied in His assurance to His earliest followers, "Be of good cheer ; I have overcome".²

¹ St. Luke xxii. 53.

² St. John xvi. 33.

VI.

THE EXAMPLE OF OTHER MEN COMPARED WITH THAT OF CHRIST.

THE next objection may be expressed as follows: "Is not the argument drawn from the unselfishness of the life of Christ materially weakened by instances, which can be produced to-day, of men who repudiate Christianity altogether, but who are prepared to lay down their lives for the good of their fellow-men? To take but one instance suggested by the conduct, not of a single individual, but of a whole class: many of the Russian Nihilists have sacrificed everything that they may be assumed to hold dear in life—wealth, honour, love of wife and children—and have advanced steadily towards torture and death on behalf of their fellow-men, without any foresight of success and unsupported by the vestige of a supernatural creed. Is not this self-sacrifice of an even higher order than that exhibited by Christians, or indeed by Christ Himself?"

The instance adduced is the more interesting, because most people have little sympathy either with the results achieved by the Nihilists or the methods adopted to secure these results. Prince Kropotkin's book, entitled *Memorials of a Revolutionist*, contains an account of the spread of socialistic and revolutionary principles, particularly amongst the higher and intellectual classes of Russian society. Whatever the personal sympathies of the reader may be, it

is impossible for him to peruse such a book as this, with all its details of time and place given in order to facilitate investigation, without feeling that many a parallel to the self-renunciation of a Gautama, or the voluntary adoption of poverty and disgrace of a St. Francis or a St. Benedict, is to be found to-day in Russia, outside the pale of Christianity. The author himself is far from being a reckless fanatic. He began life as a loyal page of the Emperor, and had before him the brightest prospects that any one in Russia could have. Moreover, his willing renunciation of everything that he possessed and of all his future prospects, in the uncertain hope of benefiting the poor people whom he loved so well, is equalled and indeed surpassed by the deeds of many others whose sufferings are related in his book. What, then, is to be our attitude towards such a case as this? We cannot deny the facts; for though we may disbelieve a statement here and there, and may discount some of the inferences suggested, still, after making all allowances which a sense of justice will permit, a large number of instances are left which cannot be denied or explained away, instances of heroic self-sacrifice on the part of men who do not believe any of the distinctive doctrines of the Christian faith, or acknowledge the existence of any supernatural power. The answer sometimes given, which involves a denial of the reality of the virtues described, is unworthy of a follower of Christ. He cannot escape from the difficulty, which he experiences in trying to harmonise the existence of goodness and nobility in others with the tenets of his own faith, by minimising them or by denying their existence. Christ's severest denunciations were uttered against religious men who, in the name of God and religion, were willing, for the sake of maintaining their own consistency, to call good evil. To minimise

the goodness of those who repudiate the Christian faith is not to bring honour to Christ, but to act in a spirit which He would disown. Very different were the practice and belief of the earliest Christians. Thus Justin Martyr, writing early in the second century, says "they who lived with the word are Christians, even though they were esteemed atheists, as among the Greeks, Socrates and Heracleitus and those who were like them."¹

In so far as the cases referred to create any difficulty, the difficulty arises from a failure to understand the significance of Christ's life. Instead of these instances tending to decrease the significance of His life, it is that Life which affords their only explanation. The revelation involved in the life and character of Christ ought to have led us to expect that Man was the possessor of nobler qualities than any which he had hitherto displayed. To one who appreciates the full significance of Christ's life a pessimistic view of his own is an anomaly. That life, by revealing the possibilities of human nature, makes it easier, and not more difficult, to credit goodness and virtue in all other members of the human race. That life is the final ratification of the teaching of the Old Testament that man was made in the image of God. If we accept this teaching, as interpreted to us by the life of Christ, we are justified in believing that, as He was Himself the perfect revelation of God, so every Christ-like characteristic which we can trace, whether amongst Christians or heathen, is part of God's revelation of Himself. Man, as such, is a revelation of God, a revelation which becomes clearer or less distinct according as the individual rises to, or falls away from, his own true ideal. It follows that a perfect representative of mankind must be a perfect revelation of God to men.

¹ *Justin Apol.* i. 46.

Applying this thought to the Incarnation, we believe that Christ was God's perfect revelation of Himself to men because we believe that He was perfect man.

When, then, we come across instances of self-sacrifice and heroism, as we undoubtedly do, outside the limits of the Christian faith, which forcibly remind us of Christ's own life, instead of casting doubt upon them, or attempting to minimise their significance, under a mistaken notion that they weaken the argument for the truth of Christianity, we should rather welcome them as affording proof of the all-important dogma of the Christian faith, which alone renders a belief in the Incarnation intelligible—namely, that man was made in the image of God.¹ Christ Himself foretold that the great surprise of the future would be that many should come from the East and from the West to take their places in the kingdom of God to be revealed hereafter, who had never been recognised by their fellow-men as members of that kingdom at all. Many even now are travelling Zionward who are quite unaware whither their steps are trending. Some, who imagine themselves now to be the bitter opponents of Christianity, will recognise at last that the noble impulses of which from time to time they are conscious, and to which their deeds of self-sacrifice are due, have been the promptings of the Spirit of Christ who has been dwelling as an unknown guest within them.

The self-sacrifice which the cause of revolution has often served to call forth testifies to the existence in the human breast of an instinct which is indeed divine, and which im-

¹ "The main testimony to Christianity he found . . . in that eternal witness, the revelation of what might be called the 'Mind of God' in the Christian morality, and its correlation *with the Divine in man*."—*Life of Tennyson*, by his Son, p. 273 n.

pels man to devote himself to the noblest cause of which he has experimental knowledge. In a book already referred to, entitled *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, the writer, after describing the wonderful enthusiasm which social and economic questions have often evoked, says, "The creed of social revolution has become, in many minds, a distinct substitute for a spiritual religion. It has drawn to itself the same emotional loyalty and zeal which are commonly associated with a religious faith. Men go to the scaffold as they once died for Christ, and with a spirit akin to that of Christian martyrs give their lives for the creed of social democracy." He goes on to show that this has come about because men cannot remain permanently satisfied without a creed of some kind, and that those who reject Christianity are forced to devise some scheme by which they may give expression to their desire to help their fellow-men. "The revolt of the labouring classes," he says, "is a pathetic attempt to find a substitute for religious faith, and the only effective way to meet that revolt is to prove that the Christian religion is rational, practicable, socially redemptive and economically justified."¹

There is a further point in connection with the above difficulty which must not be overlooked. In selecting any one attribute of Christ's character, in order to compare it with similar attributes possessed by other men, it must be remembered that no true comparison is possible which does not take account of character as a whole. We are often reminded of some one point in the character of Christ by the actions of a man whose life as a whole we should never dream of comparing with His. This statement applies in a special manner to the revolutionists in Russia. Assuming that they possess every virtue which their most

¹ Pp. 298 *et seq.*

ardent friends would claim for them, assuming that their courage or fortitude is comparable with, if not equal to, that which was displayed by Christ, before using such examples to show that His character was not unique, we should still need to ask whether their character was complete, or whether its development had been partial and one-sided, one virtue having perchance been developed at the expense of the character as a whole. Is the self-sacrifice of the political reformer or Nihilist found in combination with unlimited patience, with perfect sympathy with those who think differently from himself, and with entire absence of self-assertion or desire for celebrity? If not, then, although we may thank God for the partial revelation of Himself, suggested by one or more Christ-like traits in the character of such men, we cannot feel that the existence of these traits in any way detracts from the impression which Christ's character as a whole makes upon us.

Again, in comparing Christ's unselfishness with that of a Nihilist, we need to be quite clear as to what is meant by the use of the word unselfish in order to guard against exaggerated or equivocal language. Aristotle's statement that the good man must needs be a lover of himself,¹ is not opposed to the teaching of Christ. For Christ did not ask of men that they should do anything inconsistent with their own highest interests, though His views of what these interests were differed from those of His contemporaries. He did not say, "He that loseth his self shall suffer permanent loss," but the very opposite—"Whosoever shall lose his self for my sake shall save it".² The kind of unselfishness to which Positivists and others have laid claim, and which ignores ultimate self-realisation, in ignoring self, abandons

¹ *Nicom. Ethics*, ix. 8, 7: τὸν μὲν ἀγαθὸν δεῖ φίλαντον εἶναι.

² St. Mark viii. 35; cf. Greek.

the most real ground for seeking the well-being of others. For if each self is worth realising, so am I. If I am to be really ignored, so is every other "I". Self-suppression may be a secondary, but can never be the ultimate, motive of human action : a fact which St. Paul regarded as a truism when he said, "No man ever hated his own flesh".¹ The same language may be applied even to the life of Christ. The writer who describes the final motive of His conduct in the words of the Psalmist, "Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God," tells us also that "Jesus . . . for the joy" (of man's redemption) "that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God".² Perfect unselfishness is not incompatible with the knowledge that a particular course of action will coincide with the highest interest of the actor, but it demands that this knowledge shall not form the ultimate motive of action. Even the political martyr who has died without any expectation of a future life, unless, indeed, his actions have been dictated by blind instinct, has been conscious that the refusal to make the sacrifice that seemed to be demanded of him would militate against his own highest interests. In one sense it is probably true to say that a perfectly unselfish life is inconceivable, and has never been lived by any one. The highest form of unselfishness that we can understand is that of a life in which self-interest is not so much renounced as forgotten, and in which the conception of self-interest is so purified that it has ceased to be possible for the actor to distinguish between it and the Divine will.

But, wherever it is found, and however much it may be misunderstood, self-sacrifice is a mark of a Christ-like character, and can be the only true bond of union between

¹ Eph. v. 29.

² Heb. x. 7 ; xii. 2.

men of different nations and different characteristics. The *Nineteenth Century*, in its closing number for last century, contains an article, written from a Hindu point of view, on "Present Day Progress in India". The writer, Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, speaks of the results of Christian missionary work in India during the previous quarter of a century. His remarks in regard to the methods adopted by Christian missionaries are by no means complimentary; but when he comes to speak of the influence which the character of Christ has exerted on his fellow-countrymen, he makes the following striking admission. He says, "We maintain . . . that the greatest and best leaders of all lands will for ever continue to retain their places as national examples and lights, but that the excellences of all peoples and popular heroes shall be summed up to form the unity of the Son of God and Man. Perhaps the Christian missionaries in India have not very largely helped to form this idea; certainly modern Christian literature . . . has helped us more. . . . The only obstruction in the way (of the missionaries) has been their theology. But even that theology is much more temperate now than it was at one time. They no longer attack Hindu faith and principles with the same violence as before, they no longer criticise our national prophets with the same antipathy, nor do they look upon our national usages and reforms with the same disfavour. But this is not sufficient. We look forward to a day when Christian missionaries and Hindu reformers will form a brotherhood, different indeed in theology, but one in spirit, in aim, in the inspired humanity of Jesus Christ, and the Fatherhood of God."

If we do not take quite so optimistic a view of the possibility of grafting Christianity upon Hinduism as the writer, we cannot but regard with profound interest the in-

fluence which the character of Christ has already exerted upon many thoughtful inhabitants of India who would shrink in horror from the suggestion that they were converts to Christianity. We can sympathise also, and that most fully, with the statement of the writer that the virtues exemplified in the lives of heroes other than Christ render it easier, and not more difficult, to believe in Him as "the Son of God and Man". The writer of the above article would be interested to know that on the porticoes of many Christian churches in the East, Homer, Solon, Thucydides, Pythagoras, and Plato are portrayed as preparing the way for Christ.

In putting forward the Gospel description of Christ's character as an argument for the genuineness of the original, and indirectly for the truth of Christianity, we are quite aware that this character appeals more immediately to certain individuals and to certain races than it does to others. To admit this, however, is but to take notice of the fact that Christ's experiences of life were in a real sense conditioned by the local and temporary circumstances under which He lived. It in no way proves that the argument in support of the Christian faith, which the Gospel portrait of Christ suggests, may not, if rightly presented, eventually appeal with equal force to all.

One who has spent a long life in close touch with Indians and Indian thought, in speaking of the obstacles to the spread of Christianity in India, says: "The character of Christ is not, I am convinced, as acceptable to Indians as it is to the northern races. It is not so completely their ideal, because it is not so visibly supernatural, so completely beyond any point which they can, unassisted by Divine grace, hope to attain. . . . I never talked frankly with a Hindoo in whom I did not detect this feeling to

be one inner cause of his rejection of Christianity. He did not want that particular sublimity of character, but another, something more of the sovereign and legislator. . . . This is, when all is said, and there is much to say, the master difficulty of Christianity in India, and the one which will delay conversion on a large scale." The writer goes on, however, to say that this difficulty should not cause us to despair. "It will be overcome," he says, "one day when Christ is preached by Christians unsaturated with European ideas, but till then it will be the least removable of impediments, though it produces this result also—that when it is removed the convert will display, does even now in rare cases display, an approximation to the European ideal of Christ such as in Europe is scarcely found, or found only in a few men whom all the sects join to confess as saintly Christians."¹

¹ *Asia and Europe*, by Meredith Townsend, pp. 69-71.

VII.

SAINTS MORE INSPIRING THAN A GOD-MAN?

THE next objection may be expressed thus :—

“ Is it not the fact that in the majority of cases the lives of heroes, other than Christ, appeal to men much more directly than His life can ever do? Must it not, from the very nature of the case, be true that the lives of heroic and saintly men, whose standard of life and action, though higher than ours, has nevertheless been sufficiently near to ours to encourage us with the hope of being able to attain to it, appeal with greater force to us than the character of the highest conceivable man, who is at the same time something more than man? As the endowments of the former are strictly human, their example appears to be more encouraging and inspiring than that of a God-man.”

This difficulty is one which many a professing Christian scarcely likes to admit, even to himself, because he has a feeling that the admission that other characters are for him more inspiring than is the character of Christ reflects upon the perfect adaptation to human needs of the revelation of God in Christ. As he reads, for example, the story of some Christ-like life, he feels almost ashamed that the life of the pupil should have more power to influence him than that of the Master whom the pupil professed to follow.

The experience of any teacher of the young, or of the

missionary who endeavours to instruct uncivilised races in the Christian faith, may help to show what is the true explanation of this feeling. No one would be content to tell a child or a savage that to be a Christian is to reproduce the character of Christ, and then leave him to draw his own inferences as to the way in which this reproduction was to be achieved. It is as though a master should place a complicated drawing or painting before his pupil and bid him reproduce it forthwith. The very perfection of the work would be the measure of the pupil's despair, inasmuch as there would be nothing to suggest to him the necessary intermediate stages between his own imperfect work and the masterpiece which lay before him. It was the ladder, with its angels, half-human, half-divine, which seemed to connect heaven and earth, that made it possible for Jacob to gain any true conception of Jehovah. It is the lives of men, worthy of the name of men, that should be to us the ladder by which we may rise to a true appreciation of the God-man who stands above the human race as its ideal and ultimate goal.

The power to copy from the highest exemplar is one which requires to be developed. It is true that St. Paul in the epistle which contained his most advanced teaching said, "Be ye imitators of God as beloved children,"¹ but to the Christians to whom he wrote, "I have fed you with milk, not with meat, for ye were not yet able to bear it,"² he wrote also, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ".³ The true way in which to teach the young or ignorant to imitate Christ is to say to them in the spirit of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians: See how one or another trait in the character of Christ is illustrated by the experience of this or that person whom you yourselves

¹ Eph. v. 1.² 1 Cor. iii. 2.³ *Ib.* xi. 1.

know, and whose life is in some respects very little better than yours. The method, moreover, which we should thus use in trying to teach others, is the method which we unconsciously adopt in learning for ourselves.

Apart from the question of national temperament, the appeal which a perfect life makes to men, varies as their own characters vary. It requires an unselfish man to be inspired by perfect unselfishness. To use an illustration suggested by the experience of the artist: as only a master painter can fully appreciate a masterpiece, so the converse is true, and the boy who could fully appreciate the masterpiece of the great Italian artist was justified in exclaiming, "I too am a painter". The life of Christ is the great masterpiece of humanity. It is because we are partakers of His nature that we can hope to gain the inspiration which His life affords, and it is in proportion as we understand that life that we can say "I too am a partaker of His nature". So, too, the lives of those who, whether consciously or unconsciously, have been inspired by the portrait of Christ, will often serve as the most helpful interpretation of His life.

The full significance of Christ's life cannot be grasped by one who merely studies the sayings attributed to Him or the works He is reported to have done. He must go out into the world and see for himself what influence the words and works of Christ are exerting. To adopt the statement of a recent writer: "Every great and powerful personality reveals a part of what it is, only when seen in those whom it influences. Nay, it may be said that the more powerful the personality which a man possesses, and the more he takes hold of the inner life of others, the less can the sum total of what he is be known only by what he himself says and does. We must look at the reflection

and the effects which he produced in those whose leader and master he became.”¹ History supplies not merely the interpretation of the principles of Christianity, but the only adequate interpretation of the life and character of Christ.

There is no department of human life in Christendom which has not something to tell us of the influence which His character has exerted in the world, and which, if we are to estimate this aright, we can afford to omit from our consideration. It is true that He left no writing behind Him: but what post-Christian literature would remain, if we were to give up all in which the influence of His teaching could be detected? He was neither poet nor musician: but poet and musician alike have borrowed from His life the inspiration which has enabled them to accomplish their best work. He contributed nothing to architecture, little or nothing to art; but to His honour, and for the better realisation of His abiding presence, have been erected the noblest buildings the world has seen, and sculptors and painters have vied with each other in perpetuating His memory and His influence. He kept aloof from all politics and promulgated no schemes for the redress of social evils: but far and wide, in civilised and in heathen lands, wherever His teaching has become known and His character has been understood, slavery and oppression have tended to disappear and justice and mercy to take their place.

The danger, from a practical point of view, of fixing attention upon the study of Christ-like men, instead of upon Christ Himself, is that men should rest satisfied with aspiring after the incomplete and should lose sight of the true ideal of human nature. The history of the develop-

¹ Professor Harnack, *What is Christianity*, pp. 9 *et seq.*

ment of saint worship and of the respect shown to the Blessed Virgin Mary shows how real this danger is.

One result of the Arian controversy in the third and fourth centuries was that the Church found it necessary to safeguard itself against the introduction of error by carefully drawn up dogmatic statements concerning the divine nature of Christ. The reaction against Arianism in the past and the dread of Unitarianism in the present have caused men to speak much of the divinity of Christ and to minimise the significance of His human character. Moreover, in proportion as they exalted Christ above humanity they felt how impossible it was to imitate His virtues, and, inasmuch as disembodied virtue can never afford lasting inspiration, they began to adopt as exemplars of human action the best men, other than Christ, of whom they knew anything. At first the immediate followers of Christ, and more especially the Virgin Mother, were venerated, not for any merits of their own, but because they reflected something of the character of Christ Himself. The Virgin was represented in early Christian art as holding up the infant Jesus for the adoration of the world, but, as time went on, the Virgin came to be more and more adored for her own sake and the Christ receded out of sight. The visitor to the Roman Oratory at Brompton to-day may see the last and most pathetic illustration of this tendency to put the human Christ into the background, as he gazes upon the large-sized image of the Virgin, no longer with the infant Jesus in her embrace, but with her arms stretched out in an attitude of compassion over London, inviting its inhabitants to draw near to herself. There are some who are afraid lest Mariolatry and the veneration paid to saints, which characterise the Roman Church, should spread amongst the members of our own. Whether such fears

be well-grounded or not, it is certain that the antidote to Mariolatry and saint worship is not the denunciation of the errors which they may involve, but a more intelligent appreciation of the human character of the Christ, whose claims they tend to supplant.¹

¹ *Cf.* pp. 38 *et seq.*

VIII.

THE DEATH OF CHRIST INSEPARABLE FROM HIS LIFE.

THE next objection is not directly suggested by a study of the life of Christ, but arises from the interpretation of His life which is involved in the explanations that popular theology has frequently given of His death.

“If Christ’s death were of the nature of a transaction between Himself and God, in which man had no direct concern, save as a resultant beneficiary, is not His death lifted altogether out of the plane of human thought and experience?” Or, to put the question in a slightly different form: “If the Christ who died in order to change God’s attitude towards men is held to be the same Being who had previously lived a real human life on the plane of ordinary experience, does not the personality of Christ become so incomprehensible as to cease to appeal to us at all?”

The difficulty here raised has availed, more than perhaps any other, to create a barrier between Christ’s life and that of all other men and to weaken the influence which it would otherwise have exerted upon them. If Christ in His death was separated completely from all other men, if He died simply as their substitute, or to pay a debt which they owed, or to reconcile an angry God to men; if, in fact, His death was of the nature of a transaction, in which humanity had no immediate and necessary

concern, the deduction is obvious. The Gospels tell us of but one Christ. It is impossible to separate His life and death and to say that, whereas He lived subject in a real sense to the limitations of other men, in order that they might be able to follow in His steps, He died a death to which human history, from the very nature of the case, can never offer any parallel, but which differed altogether, in kind as well as in degree, from the self-sacrifice unto death to which other men may be called. To assume such a separation is to render meaningless the idea of the human personality of Christ, and to diminish, if not to destroy, the significance of His life.

There are two ways in which an attempt has been made to meet this difficulty. Some have been content to brush it aside with the frank denial that Christ's death differed in any important respect from that of other good and holy men. This is the solution of the difficulty offered by modern Unitarianism. The power and attraction of the Unitarian creed are due to the fact that it is thus enabled to present Christ as a real person, very near to the lives and experience of ordinary men. It is a beautiful creed, free from mystery and capable of being understood by all. But it is a creed which has no explanation to offer of the consciousness of sin which is innate in the human breast, and it is one which, alike in the experience of individuals and of Churches, has appeared the more incomplete and unsatisfying in proportion as this sense of sin has been developed. The Unitarian creed, moreover, involves the assumption that several of the statements attributed to Christ have been misreported, and that the writers of the New Testament have misinterpreted essential parts of His teaching. Even this assumption would be easier to accept than it would be to believe that for man's sin-laden soul no

help is provided, other than that to be derived from the inspiration of a magnificent example—that the pit, which Bunyan saw beneath the cross of Christ, and into which the pilgrim's burden rolled, has no real existence.

The alternative does not, however, lie between Unitarianism and the acceptance of any theory in regard to Christ's death which, by removing it altogether from the plane of human experience and representing it as of the nature of a transaction between Himself and another infinite Being, separates completely His life from His death. Theories of the Atonement form, to many minds, the greatest obstacle to a belief in an atonement. The attempt to explain what Christ Himself never explained tends to make the fact itself obscure and unreal. One reason why the life of Christ avails so little to inspire the lives of many earnest Christians is that in their efforts to explain the inexplicable, and to understand that "which angels desire to look into,"¹ they have adopted metaphors and illustrations derived from the practice of an earthly law court which, followed out to their legitimate issue, involve teaching that is not only untrue but immoral.

We can readily understand how a man who has spent his lifetime in the study and practice of law will come at last to view everything from a legal standpoint, and will unconsciously introduce legal metaphors into his ordinary conversation. But we often fail to remember the dominating influence which respect for law and legal forms has had in determining the interpretation of many passages in the New Testament, which contain references to the death of Christ, but which were not spoken, or written, from a legal standpoint. The legacy which the Roman empire has bequeathed to Europe is unlimited respect for law

¹ 1 Peter i. 12.

Many can remember how simple the whole scheme of the Atonement seemed, when they were children and when it was explained to them that Christ on the cross paid their lawful debt, or bore the exact amount of punishment which they had legally incurred, and that therefore they were forgiven "for His sake".¹ But, as they grew older, the difficulty of understanding the meaning of Christ's death was greatly increased by the explanation of it which had been offered to them. The difficulty of believing the doctrine of substitution, when expressed, not in the language of the New Testament, but in legal terms borrowed from Roman jurisprudence, has led many to reject the doctrine altogether. Nor is it surprising that men should entertain doubts as to the divine origin of a doctrine which seems to conflict with their deepest moral instincts and convictions. Such doubts have been summarised in the following words, "If suffering for sin comes from God, it is a good thing, not a bad thing. We do not want to be saved from any part of the discipline of a Father. If God is not a Father but an offended, jealous and dreadful tyrant, then immoral ways of escaping His wrath may be permissible: but what if God is really our Father? We do not desire to be saved from what He may think best, least of all saved by the agonies of an innocent Being. Or if this world is half the devil's world and God has contrived

¹ Many would be surprised to be told that the New Testament does not contain any statement that God forgives man "for Christ's sake". This oft-repeated expression has done much to popularise a false view of the significance of His death. In Eph. iv. 32, where the A.V. had wrongly rendered the original "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you," the correct rendering, as given in the R.V., is "God also *in Christ* forgave you," Gk. ἐν Χριστῷ. The expression in 1 John ii. 12, "on account of His name" (cf. Gk.) lends no support to the popular use of the phrase "for Christ's sake" in connection with any theory of atonement.

an amazing and Miltonic plan for seeming to pay the devil his price and outwitting him, let us say so, and believe it who can. I cannot. But if this world is the manifestation and theatre of a God whom we call Father, then we do not want a substitute to bear our discipline for us : we want a power to enable us, and a teacher to show us how, to live and suffer and die, and through it all to be close to God.”¹

The writer, whose words have been quoted, does not reject the language of the Christian creed, “He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,” nor the language of our Church catechism, “He hath redeemed me and all mankind”. Still further would he be from repudiating the statement “the Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many”.² This last statement is that most frequently quoted in support of the doctrine of legal substitution alluded to above. The word “ransom” (λύτρον) here used, is as truly metaphorical as are the words “vine” and “shepherd,” in the discourses recorded by St. John. In order to appreciate the meaning of the word ransom, it is necessary to call up before the mind a succession of images suggested by the relations between slaves and slave-owners. The danger which then arises is that the details of the picture, into which the original metaphor has been expanded, should be treated as though they were all of equal significance. A ransom is, strictly speaking, a price paid to a master to secure the liberty of a slave, whom he would otherwise be unwilling to set free. Those who have treated these words of Christ as though they formed part of a legal document, or as though the analogy suggested by the word ransom must necessarily hold good in its every detail, have been forced to ask

¹ Archdeacon Wilson, *The Gospel of the Atonement*, p. 76.

² St. Mark x. 45.

themselves the question, To whom had this ransom to be paid? Who was the master that was unwilling to set free his slave? Was it God or was it the devil? It is hard to say which answer has done more to render the doctrine of an atonement incredible to thoughtful minds. The results which have followed the attempts that have been made to solve the difficulties raised by these questions are a warning of the danger of basing an argument upon the details of an analogy when, as in the present instance, the analogy itself is contained in a single word. To discuss the bearing which this verse has upon the general doctrine of an atonement would lead us far away from our present purpose, which is to show that Christ in His death, as certainly as in His life, was "perfect man". It will be sufficient to point out that to those who reject altogether the idea of legal substitution the verse has nevertheless a clear and definite meaning. What this meaning is will be more easily understood if we consider the title which Christ here applies to Himself. He says, "the Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many". How different would the teaching contained in the verse have been if it had read, "the Son of God . . . came to give his life a ransom for many". But this is what might have been expected had the verse been intended to teach the doctrine of a legal substitution or of a compact made between Christ and God in reference to man.

In the words of another, who has written on the doctrine of the Atonement from a point of view opposite to that of the writer before mentioned: "So far as the language of the New Testament goes, there is no reason for supposing our Lord to have been substituted for us in His Passion," and again, "An equivalent penalty could not satisfy God instead of the removal of sin. Even had

it been otherwise, however, it runs counter to all our best conceptions of justice that penalties should be inflicted in that fashion.”¹

It is interesting to note that, in the only other passage in the New Testament in which the word ransom (*ἀντίλυτρον*) occurs,² the human nature of the ransomer is specially emphasised. St. Paul writes, “There is one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all”.³ Christ lived and died to ransom the human race from the bondage of sin, but this act of redemption was accomplished by Him not as by an outsider, but in virtue of the fact that He was Himself a member of the human race and that He lived and died not so much instead of, as for, and on behalf of, His fellow men.

The suffering of an innocent being only becomes conceivable when we regard Christ as inseparably united with the human race. It is in virtue of the solidarity of the race that the self-sacrifice of all men can be summed up in Christ, and it is only in so far as the sacrifice of Christ, whether in His life or in His death, is repeated in the self-sacrifice of all men that that sacrifice becomes itself effective.

“To describe the Atonement,” says Professor Moberly, “as a waiving, for a consideration, of punishment which, in justice, ought to have been inflicted . . . can, as a serious explication of God’s dealing with man, issue only in intolerable untruth. And if the consideration . . . is

¹ *The Faith of the Gospel*, A. J. Mason, p. 190.

² Moses is referred to as one sent to be a ransomer (*λυτρωτής*) of his people (Acts vii. 35). In Deut. xiii. 5 (LXX), God is described as ransoming His people out of the house of bondage. Cf. also St. Luke i. 68; ii. 38.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

capable of being described as the unjust punishment of some other, who has no connection with the guilt, no wonder that the transaction so conceived, or described, profoundly shocks the conscience of God-like men. If this is all that we have to say about the Christian doctrine of the Atonement, much that is deepest and best in human nature will continue to cry out against it with a cry which will certainly not be silenced or appeased."¹

To return to the objection under consideration, which was this: How is it possible to regard Christ as one who lived as our example and under real human limitations—yet as the same being who afterwards died in place of us upon the Cross? A person or thing substituted for anything else must be, in the eyes of the law, distinct from that for which it is substituted. Christ, therefore, could not have died instead of, that is, as a substitute for, the human race, using the words in a strictly legal sense, unless He were entirely distinct from the human race. But, if this be so, if Christ were distinct and separated from all other men in His death, must He not also have been so in His life, otherwise, do not His personality and character become altogether incomprehensible? This difficulty arises, as has been seen, from a misinterpretation of the meaning of Christ's death—a misinterpretation which has in great measure arisen from the legal atmosphere in which the Christian theology of the West has been developed.

If it be true to say that sin can be more correctly predicated of human character or of man in himself, than of human action, the forgiveness of sins must have an immediate relation to a change of character. Such a change cannot possibly be thought of as an escape from a hostile God. So long, therefore, as Christ's death be treated as a

¹ Cf. *Atonement and Personality*, by Prof. R. C. Moberly, pp. 276 *et seq.*

sacrifice offered to a hostile Deity to obtain from Him the remission of sins, regarded as offences considered apart from the sinner, the significance either of Christ's life or of His death can never be rightly understood. Bishop Westcott, commenting on the expression used in Hebrews ii. 17, "to make propitiation for the sins of the people," says, "the essential conception is that of altering that in the character of an object which necessarily excludes the action of the grace of God. . . . The propitiation acts on that which alienates God and not on God, whose love is unchanged throughout." Hence the importance of avoiding language such as that used in the well-known book on the Atonement written by the late Dr. Dale, who says, "The remission of sins . . . brings to the man who has received it a sure and permanent escape from the hostility and the wrath of God".¹ This language, though followed by other statements, which suggest that the author did not himself hold all that the words imply, is dangerous and misleading.

If Christ's life is to exert its full influence upon our own, we must refuse to accept a theory of Atonement which represents His death as separable from His life. In thinking of His death, moreover, we need to beware of what has been called the "morbid deification of pain," as though the extreme suffering which was connected therewith was that which distinguished His death from that of all others. His death was an incident—of supreme and incalculable value no doubt, but, nevertheless, only a single incident—in the series of events which connected His Birth with His Ascension. A recent French writer says, "It is only by a violent fiction that His death can be isolated from the rest of His life . . . as though He had not made of His death the supreme act of His life. That death has, no doubt, an

¹ *The Atonement*, R. W. Dale, p. 346.

exceptional place and value, but solely because it concentrates and expresses within itself, in a manner definitive and absolute, the sacrifice of His whole life.”¹

In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul argues that if the death of Christ has abolished (not God's enmity towards us, but) our enmity towards Him, the result of this reconciliation will be that we shall be “*saved by his life*”.²

¹ *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, Auguste Sabatier, pp. 219 *et seq.*

² Rom. v. 10. Cf. R.V. marg. “in His life,” ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ.

IX.

THE EXISTENCE OF THIS CHARACTER—ITS CORRELATION WITH OTHER FACTS.

THE last objection to be considered has been expressed thus:—

“The argument adduced for the existence of this unique and supernatural character does not proceed on scientific lines, and is not such as would be accepted in support of any ordinary fact, or to prove the existence of anything unconnected with theology. The alleged fact is not one that can be apprehended by the senses, and the evidence in support of it is of a remote and circumstantial kind, from which no real certainty can be derived. Moreover, the existence of such a character cannot be correlated with any other established fact in the history of the present or the past.”

In regard to the first point it may be said that the proof that Christ existed, and that His character was such as the Gospels describe, rests in part upon the evidence of the human senses, and has been transmitted to us in the same way as the evidence for all other historical facts. But it rests also upon the fact that the Gospel description of Christ's character harmonises with what the best and noblest men have felt the ideal man must be. Nor can it be said that this latter evidence does not proceed on strictly scientific lines. For it is no less reasonable to argue that

there must be a reality to correspond to our ideals, than to argue that there must be something real to correspond to our sensations. It may be said that such evidence presents itself with different degrees of conviction to different minds, but this is equally true in regard to much of the evidence which is adduced in support of scientific theories.

A man's ideals change according as his character develops. There have been times in the lives of most men when the words of Faber have seemed to be no exaggeration of their real desire :—

O Lord ! that I could waste my life for others,
With no ends of my own,
That I could pour my life into my brothers,
And live for them alone.

There have been times when they have vaguely, but none the less intensely, longed for a degree of unselfishness, which none that they see around them have attained, and the possibility of attaining which seems altogether beyond them : they have longed to be set free from selfish thoughts and from petty ambitions and jealousies. They have not been able to explain to themselves the meaning of these aspirations, and as they have pondered upon the miserable shortcomings of the past, they have started back astonished at the working of their own minds, and have wondered whether such a life, as they have for a moment caught a glimpse of, must for ever remain a mere flight of the imagination, or whether under any conceivable conditions their aspirations could be realised in actual life. At times such as these the character of Christ has come to them as an authoritative revelation of that after which they have been blindly groping, and as, by careful study, they discovered how perfectly the revelation corresponds with, and at the same time surpasses, their highest impulses and

aspirations, they have felt that this discovery was no small evidence of its truth.

The words which Longfellow places as his introduction to "Hiawatha" are the expression of a well-nigh universal consciousness :—

Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
Who have faith in God and nature,
Who believe that in all ages
Every human heart is human ;
That in even savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not ;
That the feeble hands and helpless
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened,
Listen.

In answer, then, to the objection that the evidence for the existence of the character of Christ does not proceed on scientific lines, we may appeal to the experience of the objector himself and may say to him : " The character of Christ offers to you a scientific explanation of what is otherwise an inexplicable experience. You are conscious of powers, aspirations and impulses which are incompatible with the principles of utilitarianism or hedonism. But as in Christ's character there is perfected all that is potential in yours, it is manifest that His character is in a real sense correlated with your own." We may further point out how those who have tried to explain man and all his potentialities, on the supposition that he is an end to himself and that his personal interest must be the dominant principle of his actions, have never succeeded in adducing a reasonable explanation of the heroic instincts and self-sacrificing impulses by which from time to time his conduct is controlled.

Ever and anon man seems to rise above himself, and, by some splendid deed of heroism, to demonstrate how absurdly inadequate the mere dictates of self-interest are to explain his action. Such an illustration was afforded on a large scale at the moment when the troopship *Birkenhead* sank in 1852 off the east coast of South Africa. The women and children having been placed in the only available boats, the men to the number of 454 were drawn up on deck, as on parade, and the order, "Stand still and die like Englishmen" was given, as the deck was visibly sinking beneath them, an order which was obeyed unhesitatingly and without an attempt on the part of a single individual to secure his own safety by breaking the ranks. When Professor Maurice, who was lecturing at Cambridge in opposition to the utilitarianism of Bain, read this account out to his class, the whole of the students present rose and cheered. A story like this, which appeals to men strongly, because they are conscious of a sympathetic impulse to imitate such action, demands an explanation of an altogether different order from any which utilitarianism or refined self-interest has to offer, an explanation which the character of Christ, in whom all the possibilities of human nature were perfectly realised, alone affords.

A further answer to the objection that the existence of the character attributed to Christ cannot be correlated with any other established fact in history, is suggested by a parallel difficulty in the realm of science. There is a mysterious something, which no scientific man pretends to explain, that pervades the whole known universe, and to which the name "ether" has been given. Its existence cannot be correlated with any other established fact; it makes no impression on the senses, and all the evidence which can be alleged in support of its existence is of an

indirect and circumstantial nature and only appeals to men whose minds have been specially trained to appreciate it. But, despite the limitations which condition man's knowledge of ether, its presence is an established fact which few would venture to deny. We know that it exists, because it is necessary to postulate its presence in order to account for the presence of light and in order to understand how it can be transmitted to us from outside. Light could not exist, or rather could not affect us, were its waves not transmitted through an all-pervading ether.

The Divinity of Christ, it may be urged, is a scientific hypothesis, and can be established in the same way as the existence of ether. If it is necessary to postulate the presence of ether in order to explain the sunlight which we see around us, it is equally necessary to postulate the existence of the Divine Being portrayed in the Gospels, in order to explain how He, who dwelt "in light unapproachable,"¹ became "the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world".² The fact of the Incarnation cannot be demonstrated any more than the existence of ether. In the latter case the only, and in the former case the strongest, evidence comes to us in the form of an induction. By postulating the existence of ether we are able to explain how light exists and is transmitted: by postulating the Incarnation we are able, to the same extent, to explain the new force, that appeared in human history at the time when Christ was born, which has influenced the world ever since, and the existence and action of which would otherwise remain an inexplicable mystery. Though evidence might fail to demonstrate the Divinity of Christ, it may none the less be maintained that the theory of His Divinity

¹ 1 Timothy vi. 16. ² St. John i. 9.

affords the most rational explanation of the existence of His portrait.

One further illustration afforded by the results of astronomical research may be suggested. Rather more than half a century ago, Professor Adams of Cambridge discovered the existence of the planet now known as Neptune. His study of astronomy had enabled him to predict where the planet would be found and to calculate its distance from the earth and, roughly speaking, its weight, before he or any one else had ever seen it. Within a few days of the publication of his prediction, the planet was found and his calculations in regard to its distance and weight were proved to be correct. The most interesting result of Professor Adams's work was that it demonstrated, not merely the accuracy of his particular deduction, but the trustworthiness of a whole series of facts, which were incapable of direct demonstration, but which were proved to be true by the correctness of the results which he had deduced from them. His discovery demonstrated that the astronomical science of his day could justly claim to be regarded as a ground of appeal and standard of authority in many cases with which his discovery had no direct connection. In applying this illustration to the study of the Gospels it may be said that the Gospels correspond with the astronomical treatise. The reader begins by assuming on their authority many facts which bear directly on his relation towards God, but which are incapable of demonstration. If he is prepared to act on the supposition that these facts are correct, and to prosecute his search for Divine truth by the help of this assumed revelation, he may look forward to the time when he shall discover Christ for himself, and when the discovery—attested by his innermost consciousness, and confirmed by the explanation,

which it affords of many hitherto insoluble problems connected with his life—will serve as a final proof of the truth of these first assumptions. Moreover, the knowledge thus gained will not merely establish the truth of the Christian revelation in regard to particular points, but will be to him the assurance—of far greater value than any which he can obtain from critical or historical research—that the revelation as a whole has a claim to be regarded as a trustworthy guide.

There is one further argument that is sometimes adduced against the perfection of Christ's character which is based upon the difficulties arising from (*a*) His treatment of the herd of swine and of the fig-tree, (*b*) His parable of the unjust steward and the advice with which it ends, (*c*) His words in regard to the fire of Gehenna. These incidents have been discussed at length by many writers dating back to the earliest Christian times. Even if the explanations that have been offered fail to remove altogether our sense of surprise at their occurrence, it seems hard to believe that to any one who had examined the passages referred to together with their context, and who, at the same time, had studied the character of Christ sufficiently to feel, in however small a degree, the force of its inspiration, these difficulties could be any real stumbling-block. As well might he attribute imperfection to the sun because, owing to his ignorance, he is unable to explain the nature of the spots on its surface, as attribute faults to the "Light of the world" because owing to his limited knowledge he is unable fully to understand the description which is given thereof in the Gospel record. The man who should refuse to avail himself of the sunlight because he had seen spots upon the sun's disc, which only the existence of the sunlight had made it possible for him to discern, would scarcely

be more unreasonable than he who should refuse to walk in the light reflected from Christ's character because, by the aid of the light which that character has shed upon the world, he thinks that he has discovered inconsistencies in the Gospel narrative.

It is sometimes further objected that to admit the possibility of a doubt attaching to any reported statement of Christ is virtually to abandon the defence of the Christian position. It is urged that, as a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, so, if a flaw can be detected in the chain of evidence by which the accuracy of the Gospels as a whole is supported, every statement which they contain becomes untrustworthy. But the suggested analogy is misleading. The evidence for the faith of Christianity, and especially that which the character of Christ supplies, might more correctly be compared to a net, by which, rather than by a chain, the weight of the doctrines of Christianity is supported. A thread here and there may give way in a net but that which it supports is still secure. So the evidence for particular stories or incidents reported in the Gospels may seem less strong than that for others, or we may be in doubt, especially in cases where the evangelists are not themselves agreed, as to whether one or two of the sayings of Christ have come down to us in exactly the form in which they were uttered ; but the lines of evidence, for what Christ was and did, come from so many different directions, and cross and intercross at so many points, that criticism of mere details cannot affect the argument as a whole.

It may confidently be alleged that no argument or series of arguments will ever do away with the necessity for the exercise of faith in regard to the Christian revelation, and that no complete demonstration of the truth of Christi-

anity will ever be forthcoming. All that we can expect is that, in the case of the individual, faith will prove to be justified by its results, and this in much the same way as it has from time to time been justified in other branches of knowledge or of research.

X.

REPRODUCTION OF THE CHARACTER—ITS CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE NEEDS OF HUMAN NATURE.

IN the earlier chapters of this book an attempt has been made to show that the character of Christ depicted in the Gospels furnishes the strongest available argument for the truth of the teaching which is there attributed to Him. It may further be maintained that the force of the argument is increased by the fact that this character is at once capable of reproduction, and of affording satisfaction to many unconscious needs of human nature.

To say that the character of Christ is capable of reproduction seems, at first sight, to contradict the former statement that His character was unique in history. To this objection it may be replied that at the time of its appearance this character was unique ; and, secondly, that all imitations of it, however successful, fall far behind its unique perfection.

The fact that in any real sense men have succeeded in walking in the steps of that most holy life, and that a new and higher type of character has been introduced into the world since the time of Christ, which is professedly an imitation of His, may fairly be regarded as attesting the genuineness of the original character. When any strange or seemingly incredible occurrence is reported, the question that is naturally asked is, Can it be reproduced, or

can the new principle which it seems to involve be demonstrated experimentally? An affirmative answer to these questions would afford a strong presumption that the original occurrence as reported was genuine. The answer which a missionary in China once received to the question put by him to a native inquirer, "Have you heard about the Gospel?" was, "No; but I have seen it".

It would be impossible to assert that the influence of Christianity, as it has been professed in the past, has been uniformly good. It would probably be true to say that more crimes have been committed in the name of Christianity than under any other pretext. But this fact notwithstanding, if the biographies of the best and most unselfish men who have lived in the past, or are now living, could be collected together, it would be found that the great majority have been influenced by the life of Christ or by the spirit and standard of duty which His life has introduced into the world. Most of them would be ready to say that whatever was good in their own lives was the result of a conscious effort to imitate His life. Any one who compares either the highest or the average standard of duty now in existence with that which existed before the story of Christ's life became known, will be forced to admit that it is the story of that life which more than any other influence has transformed the world.

It was the vision of Christ in human form which carried conviction to the apostle St. Paul. From that time forward he strove with passionate eagerness to reproduce the life of his Master, till at length he could say: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me". The reproduction of Christ's character in St. Paul was, to his contemporaries, and is to us who study his character as portrayed in his

writings, one of the strongest arguments for the reality of the original to which he professed to conform his life.

One reason why St. Paul's experience has not been more frequently repeated, has been the vague feeling which has so often prevailed that the life of Jesus was separate and distinct from the lives of ordinary men. Men have found it easier to admire than to follow Him, to lavish epithets of vague admiration upon His Divine attributes rather than to act as though His were a prophecy of what their life was intended to become. His character has been regarded as a fit subject for a sermon on Sunday but has had little influence upon week-day life. The explanation of the miserably low aims which many are content to set before themselves is largely to be found in the fact that they have never realised the connection between Christ's life and their own. The man who has rightly understood the relation of Christ's life to his own, and who from time to time hears or reads stories of heroes and saints, or of deeds of courage and nobility, can never dare to say of such, "That is the kind of life I could never live, that is an act I could never do," for to speak thus would be to contradict the whole teaching of Christ's life. Christ lived and died in order that men might be enabled to assimilate their lives to His, and if this be so, none can say that any imitation of that life, or any imperfect reflection of it seen in the lives of His followers, is beyond his own aspiration or hope.

A further argument for the authenticity of the description of Christ is afforded by the fact that His personality, as revealed in the Gospels, affords satisfaction to the deepest needs of human nature. From the point of view of Christian evidence it is obvious that the argument derived from the satisfaction of these needs must appeal very differently to different men, must, in fact, vary in proportion to their

consciousness of any need which cannot be satisfied by the material world around.

To the man who is conscious of his personal need of Christ but little argument is required to prove that the story of Christ's life is a true one. Nor is this equivalent to saying that a man will readily believe what he really wishes to believe. For the more conscious a man is of his need, the less ready is he to be satisfied with any superficial solace. As a man who is hungry cannot be satisfied by being given stones, however perfect an imitation they may be of the bread for which he waits, so the unnumbered instances in which the representation of Him who described Himself as the Bread of Life has satisfied the conscious needs of mankind, suggest—and with cumulative force—that the description given of him is a true one.

The consideration of the way in which Christ fulfils the needs of human nature, naturally suggests the question as to how far the prophecies of the Old Testament, which treat so largely of the needs of humanity and their destined fulfilment, can be regarded, in the light of modern criticism, as being direct prophecies of Christ. In the light of modern criticism many passages which once seemed to foretell either incidents in Christ's life or events still future, are apparently shown to have been suggested by some local occurrence, and to have referred to events contemporaneous with the times of the writer. Recent criticism even of the most conservative type, has made many feel that not only are they unable to explain, as formerly, almost every verse as a prediction, but that the whole significance of the prophetic books is for them in danger of being destroyed. Many passages, moreover, in the Psalms, which have been a help to them as interpreted in a Christian sense, seem to lose their interest if such interpretation is shown to be

historically unlikely. The difficulty, too, is not merely a personal one. They have often been at a loss as to what they were to say when teaching others in regard to the application and fulfilment of many passages in the Old Testament which were formerly regarded as distinct prophecies. Without attempting to discuss what degree of certainty may be claimed for the discoveries of Old Testament critics, let us assume, for the moment, what few, if any, would be prepared to admit, that every passage in the Psalms and Prophets can be fully explained by local events contemporaneous with the times of the writers. We may, even so, believe that the writers, both Psalmists and Prophets, were inspired by God to understand and to give utterance to the deepest needs of human nature, needs of which their contemporaries were often entirely unconscious. We may believe, too, that Christ, who came to fulfil all the needs of which other teachers—prophets in the New Testament sense of the word—had made man conscious, thereby fulfilled what were in many instances the unconscious prophecies of the Old Testament writers. These writers, in virtue of their inspiration, were enabled to see below the surface of human nature, and not only to interpret to man his own needs, but to foresee and declare that these needs would one day obtain perfect satisfaction. Such a view of inspiration as a growth, rather than as a mechanical process, should fill us with more awe and admiration than one which interprets it as the power which enabled men to make prophecies of future events, prophecies which could be of little help to their contemporaries.

Let us take a single illustration of the working of this principle. There is no apparent prophecy in the Old Testament more familiar than that which is read every

Christmas Day from Isaiah ix.: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace". These words are interpreted by our Church as applicable to the birth of Christ, as is shown by the choice of this passage for reading on Christmas Day. Many of the best commentators, however, assert that the words were spoken by the prophet in view of a temporary crisis in the history of the Jews, and that he contemplated and probably witnessed an immediate fulfilment of the prophecy. Whether this interpretation can be maintained or not the meaning of the passage and its evidential value as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah remain the same. The Incarnation was so necessary an event in human history, that any one living before its occurrence who possessed Divine inspiration sufficient to enable him to interpret aright the needs of his own time, became an unconscious prophet of the coming of Christ. Moreover, this principle still holds good. He who can read aright the deepest needs of himself and of his fellow-men to-day will need to ask for no proof of the Incarnation, he will only need to ask whether it has occurred or is yet to take place. The writer of this passage in Isaiah was inspired by God to understand the truest needs of the Jewish people, of which his contemporaries were unconscious. He was a man who had the faith to believe that God would supply these needs, and in declaring the fact that God would so supply them, he, perhaps all unconsciously, made use of language which was only fully justified by the occurrence of the Incarnation.

Let us assume, for the time being, that this particular prophecy was understood, alike by the prophet and by

those to whom he spoke, to refer to a child about to be born, who should not have grown up to boyhood till the kings of Israel and Syria, whom Ahaz feared so much, should both have been removed. The pledge, then, which the prophet was directed to give to the people in God's name in the hour of their greatest need, was contained in the birth of a child whose name, Immanuel, was to them an assurance that God's presence would be granted to them. In giving such a pledge the prophet was, whether consciously or unconsciously, declaring an eternal principle, of which the birth of the child at that particular time was an illustration, but of which the Incarnation was the one complete and final demonstration.

The same principle may be applied to the interpretation of all Old Testament prophecy; and, to say this, does not detract from the inspiration of the prophets or the genuineness of their prophecies. Their inspiration enabled them to interpret aright the needs of their own times, and, inasmuch as all history is of a piece, he who interprets aright the needs of his own time interprets the needs of all time. The fact that their words possess a significance far transcending the events of their own age, is an illustration of the law that the knowledge of the present involves a knowledge of the eternal. For all history is the expression of the thought of the Eternal Being. To understand, therefore, the history of any period, however short, is to understand, not merely how God deals with men to-day, but what will be the history of to-morrow. To understand aright the needs of any human being is to become, whether consciously or otherwise, a prophet of the Christ. The closing passage of Browning's *Saul* contains a striking illustration of the way in which the consciousness and true interpretation of human needs develop at last into such a

prophecy. David is represented as arguing with himself that the sympathy and longing for self-sacrifice with which the greatness of Saul's needs had inspired him must imply the existence of the same qualities in the Divine Being. Saul's need could only be fully met by one who was human as well as Divine.

Would I suffer for him that I love ? So would'st Thou, so wilt Thou !

.
'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for : my flesh that I seek
In the Godhead ! I seek and I find it, oh, Saul : it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee : a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever : a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee. See the Christ stand !

Prophecy explained in this way is no longer available as an argument for the truth of Christianity to the same extent that it once was, at any rate for the purpose of convincing unbelievers ; but in the case of those who have already learnt to believe in the truth of Christianity, the apparent loss is more than compensated for. To them the study of the prophets sheds light not only upon isolated facts in the life of Christ or in the still distant future, but upon all history, present as well as past. At the same time, they are able to realise how the Incarnation has brought with it the fulfilment of that of which, as St. Peter says, "the prophets inquired and searched diligently" ; how it has not only revealed but fulfilled the deepest wants of human nature.

The character of Christ reveals to men their needs by revealing to them the possibilities of human nature. Had they not this portrait to look at they would never have known what a perfect man was, and therefore what they themselves were meant to become. He is the key to, the interpretation of, our every need. Do we ask, what must

we do? His answer is: "I am the way". Do we ask, what must we think? His answer is: "I am the truth". Do we ask, what must we be? Once again He says: "I am the life". Whether for conduct, for creed, or for character, He is the fulfilment of our highest aspirations, the final answer to our every question.

In other words,

. . . the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.¹

Man's deepest needs are not those which can be most easily expressed in words. This deficiency of language is often felt by the artist. The sculptor or painter, for example, finds it impossible to describe even to himself wherein his work falls short of what he would wish it to be; but when his work is placed side by side with some masterpiece of art, his own deficiencies are at once made manifest, and he is enabled to realise at what he has been blindly aiming. An experience in some degree similar to this is common to nearly all. Nature sometimes helps men to understand, and to find expression for, needs of which they had previously been scarcely conscious. As we have listened to beautiful music, as we have watched the glory of the sunset, as we have gazed upon some alpine peak towering above us with its snowy mantle, or as we have stood upon the ocean steamer amidst the seemingly irresistible strength of the storm, we have felt that nature was not only suggesting, but was giving actual expression to, thoughts and aspirations of which till then we had been only half conscious.

Wordsworth's lines, in his ode on revisiting Tintern Abbey, describe this power of nature to guide and control the mind of man:—

¹ Browning, *A death in the Desert*.

XI.

THE CHRIST THAT IS TO BE.

THIS expression, which the writer of *In Memoriam* has made familiar, suggests that in the future the significance of the life which was lived long ago in Palestine will be increasingly realised as it is lived over again in other men. It is with this object that the missionary work of the Church is being carried on. This, too, was the aim which actuated the first great Christian missionary.

St. Paul regarded himself as under an obligation to preach the Christian faith to all men not merely because he believed it to be adapted to the needs of all, but because the realisation of the ideal, which his Master had given to the world, was beyond the reach of any individual or of any single race.

A common misapprehension exists in the minds of many who take a superficial interest in missionary work amongst the heathen, that the chief, if not the only, object of such work is to benefit individuals, or, in theological language, to save souls. These persons frequently excuse themselves from supporting a missionary society on the ground that there are individuals at home who are as far from God and whose souls are therefore in as great need of being saved as any that can be found in heathen lands. The force of this objection arises from a failure to understand the real significance of missionary enterprise. All,

or at least nearly all, who profess a belief in Christianity, admit that it is suited to become the universal religion of the human race. But few realise what this admission implies. If Christianity is capable of appealing to, and of supplying the wants of, all mankind, it follows that the full force and significance of Christianity will never be understood until this appeal has been made and these wants supplied. It follows further that, apart from the question of what advantages may accrue to individuals, or to bodies of men, by the preaching to them of the doctrines of Christianity, it is only as the result of missionary work, carried on amongst every race throughout the whole world, that an adequate conception can be gained of the potentialities and of the real nature of the Faith. The practice and teaching of St. Paul afford an illustration of this statement. That St. Paul's chief object in preaching Christianity was not to benefit individuals may be seen by a study of the method of his work. If his chief object had been to save souls he would never have left the great centres of population, such as Antioch, Ephesus, or Rome. Whilst he was engaged in his long itinerant missions men were dying every day in these cities who had never heard of the Christian faith, and who had at least as great a personal claim upon him as those to whom he was endeavouring to preach. His aim in traversing sea and land was not to benefit individuals, but it was, as he said himself, to build up the Body of Christ—the Christian Church—by bringing to it that which every part was intended to supply. He regarded Christianity as the universal religion, not simply because it was intended to supply the needs of all, but because the manifestation, we might almost say the Incarnation, of Christ could only be completed through the experience of all. It is the possibility of helping to com-

plete the Body of Christ, and of discovering and demonstrating the full significance of our faith, which supplies the highest and most imperious motive for the prosecution of missionary work.

There is much in common between the methods by which the study of Christianity and that of natural science must be pursued. The naturalist, who desired to understand completely the nature of any particular seed, would not be satisfied with sowing a specimen in one locality, or under any single sky. To ascertain its latent possibilities he would require to see how its growth varied with every variation of soil and climate. Nor until he had made an exhaustive series of experiments would he venture to assume that he fully understood the nature of his seed. May not the same be said of the Christian Faith? Until we have seen how Christianity can develop, under all the varied conditions of human life throughout the whole world, we cannot dare to say that we have fully understood the meaning of our faith, or the life and character upon which that faith is based. Every country and every people have something to contribute to Christianity, and the completion of the Christian revelation awaits the contribution of each. How partial and limited would our own ideas of Christianity have been had its development been confined to Palestine or to the Jewish race! How incomplete will the knowledge of our faith remain until we have had the opportunity of witnessing its development amongst the still unevangelised races of the world!

The words of Bishop Westcott, spoken primarily with reference to Indian missions, are applicable to missions in all times. "We have inherited a priceless treasure of elaborated doctrine, which represents the experience, the thought, the character of the West. . . . Our first impulse

is to offer exactly that which corresponds with our own position to men who are wholly different from us in history, in faculties, in circumstances of life. But in so doing we really tend, as far as lies in us, to impoverish the resources of humanity. We do dishonour to the infinite fulness of the Gospel. . . . If we could establish the loftiest type of Western Christianity in India as the paramount religion, and it is, I believe, wholly impossible to do so, our triumph would be in the end a loss to Christendom.”¹

The thought expressed by Bishop Westcott may be supplemented by that of Professor Ramsay, who says in his book on the *Seven Churches of Asia*: “There is no religion but Christianity, which is wholly penetrated both with the European and the Asiatic spirit. . . . The long-unquestioned domination of European over Asiatic is now being put to the test, and is probably coming to an end. What is to be the issue? That depends entirely on the influence of Christianity. . . . The ordinary traveller in the East can tell that it is as impossible to Europeanise the Asiatic as it is to make an Asiatic out of a European; but he has not learned that there is a higher plane on which Asia and Europe may “mix and meet”. That plane was once in an imperfect degree reached in the Græco-Asiatic cities, whose creative influence in the formation of Roman and modern society is beginning to be recognised by some of the latest historical students; and the new stage towards which Christianity is moving . . . will be a synthesis of European and Asiatic nature and ideas.”

The development of the formal expression of the Christian faith has been the direct result of foreign missionary work,

¹ Westcott's *Religious Office of the Universities*,

and it is the consideration of what has happened in the past which renders the prospect of the future full of hope.

The early Christian Church, as soon as it began to develop missionary activity, came into contact with *Hellenic* thought by the aid of which it was enabled to elaborate its theological terminology and to state in accurate philosophical language its apprehension of the meaning of the Incarnation. It is impossible to estimate the influence upon subsequent Christian thought which was exerted by men such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Athanasius.

Nor was the contribution of the *Latins* to the elaboration of Christian thought less. If they added comparatively little to the Christology of the Church they contributed much to the elucidation of the nature of man. Whilst the Incarnation formed the chief subject of study in the Eastern Church the Atonement and the corruption of human nature with which the doctrine of the Atonement was connected occupied the attention of the West. The elaboration of Christian doctrine has doubtless suffered through the tendency to seek after an impossible precision of language or of thought and an excessive love of legal definition. It is true, as Professor Maine has said, that Western theology is saturated with Roman law.¹ The gain, however, to the Christian Church far outweighed the loss.

In later time the missionary activity of the Church was directed in turn to the different races of northern Europe, and each contributed something towards the elucidation of the Christian faith.

The *Goths* contributed little from an intellectual standpoint, but they helped to recall the Christians and others

¹ Maine's *Ancient Law*, cix. p. 348 (ed. 1861).

whom they conquered to a clearer recognition of the purity of home life and to a keener love for children. Moreover the meaning of Christian chivalry was first exemplified by them.

The *Teutons* helped to reassert the right of private judgment and the duty and responsibility of the individual, and to introduce a manly type of Christianity.

The *Celts* helped to explain to the world the meaning of Christian love, sympathy and enthusiasm. The ideal which they set before themselves suggests the emotional as distinguished from the practical or intellectual types which are to be seen amongst other races.

If it be true to say that Jews, Greeks, Romans, Teutons and Celts have each in turn contributed to the interpretation of the life and character of Christ, it is reasonable to expect that Indians, Chinese, Japanese and the other non-Christian races will yet make a similar contribution.

Had the vision which appeared to St. Paul at Troas and beckoned him across to the shores of Europe, guided him instead to the Far East, to Persia, to India or to China, and had the Christian Church instead of being developed in a Greek, Roman, Teutonic and Celtic environment, been developed under the modes of thought characteristic of the Far East, and had we ourselves received the faith in comparatively recent times, brought to us by missionaries from these countries, how different in many important respects would be our interpretation of the meaning of Christ's life and work?

Suppose that a branch of the Christian Church had been established in *China* by the labours of St. Paul, and that Christianity had spread and developed as it did in Europe. It would require a knowledge of Chinese thought and character such as no European possesses to say with any degree

of certainty the special developments of Christianity which would have been seen in the history of the Chinese Church ; but no stretch of imagination is required to suggest one or two of its most probable characteristics. The tenacity of purpose, the indomitable perseverance and the unlimited patience which we in our life of excitement and impatience despair of attaining, fit the Chinese to understand and to explain the same qualities as they were illustrated in the life of Christ.

Again, the Chinese are the most rigidly conservative nation the world has ever produced. Chinese thought and customs dating back for thousands of years remain still stereotyped and unchanged. Not impossibly, the Church organisation, and the methods of teaching and worship which St. Paul would have introduced, would have been preserved to us unaltered, and would have afforded an instructive object-lesson of apostolic uses. Once more, the tendency of Chinese thought, is directly opposed to the spirit of individualism which in the West has distorted men's views of Christ. To the Chinese the family, not the individual, is the unit of society ; his nation, which to him is equivalent to the world, is summed up in what he regards as its divine head, the Emperor. The duty of the individual is to show honour not only to the living, but to those who have gone before. These are thoughts on which the Chinese constantly dwell and which directly influence their conduct. The belief that a man can ennoble his ancestors by his own good deeds bears emphatic witness to the solidarity and continuity of the human race. It is easy to imagine then how a Chinese Christian Church would have grasped and developed this side of the Christian faith and how it would have afforded a practical illustration of the truths taught in the Epistle to the Ephesians,

The position assigned to the father in Chinese life, and still more that assigned to the Emperor as the father of the nation, would have prepared the way for the recognition of the All-Father, of Him "of whom the whole family (or, as it should perhaps be rendered, 'all fatherhood') in heaven and earth is named". In the prayer which, in accordance with ancient custom, the Emperor of China annually repeats on behalf of his people, the words occur: "Thou hast vouchsafed, O God, to hear us, for Thou as our Father dost regard us. I, Thy child, dull and unenlightened, am unable to show forth my feelings."

Let us take again the case of *Japan*. There is no country in the world where Christianity appears to be making steadier or more encouraging progress. Those who are best able to judge say that whilst as a general rule only those profess the Christian faith who have become Christians by conviction, the number of professing Christians is, nevertheless, rapidly increasing. Moreover, there are already signs discernible that Japanese Christianity will be no slavish imitation of the Christianity of the West. In the *Nippon sei Kokwai*, *i.e.*, the Japan Church, we have the nucleus of a Far Eastern Church which may yet influence the West to at least as great a degree as the military and naval victories of the Japanese seem likely to do. The Japanese Church has adopted the Thirty-nine Articles of our English Church, but it has done so only provisionally, and we look forward to the day when Japanese theologians will be in a position to restate the fundamental doctrines of our faith in language that will differ very considerably from the stereotyped formulas of the sixteenth century, which were the final outcome of long centuries of controversy. What we hope to witness, and what may reasonably be expected, in the future is a Far Eastern

Christian Church, capable of seeing and of interpreting to the world aspects of the universal religion, revealed in Christ, which we in the West could never discover for ourselves, but which are none the less essential to a complete understanding of our faith.

Possibly, too, the appreciation of natural beauty which characterises the Japanese may contribute something to the elucidation of the faith. Thus the present Bishop of Lahore says: "Who that has seen anything of the innate sense of beauty which is so wonderfully developed in the Japanese character can doubt what one at least of its contributions to our common life will be when they, in God's good time, take their place alongside of us in the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, and as members of the Body of Christ? I often think that in such a text as that of Isaiah, 'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty,' a depth of meaning will open out to Japanese minds and hearts, and a power of attraction be exercised upon them, far beyond that which is present, or which is possible in our own case."

To pass from Japan to *India*. Suppose that St. Paul's footsteps had been directed thither, or that the work assigned by tradition to St. Thomas had borne fruit corresponding with that which resulted from St. Paul's work in Europe. How great would have been our gain to-day, how much more completely should we have been able to grasp the full meaning of the Incarnation, had we been able to study it as developed in India! In attempting to compare the modes of thought characteristic of India with those of Europe, and more especially of the Teutonic races, two points to be particularly noted are, first, the contemplative nature of the Far East as contrasted with the practical temperament of the West; and, secondly, the

intense religiousness which is common to nearly all the races of India. European Christianity, if so general a term conveys any meaning, is of a distinctly utilitarian type. We can hardly imagine a European, still less an Englishman, spending a lifetime in wrapt contemplation of the infinite and unknowable, oblivious to the wants of nature and to changing circumstances around. He finds it hard enough to spend a few minutes at a time in meditation upon things which lie beyond the reach of his senses. But, impossible as we find it to place ourselves in the attitude of the average Hindu or Buddhist, we cannot for a moment doubt but that a people, trained as the peoples of India have been, should be able to see and to interpret to the world aspects of the truth which is in Christ that we in the West could never have discovered for ourselves.

One of the greatest obstacles to the spread of Christianity at the present time in India is the system of caste. It is impossible to find any parallel in history to the extraordinary influence which caste has exerted upon the destinies of the Indian people. It was caste that interposed the barrier which checked the flood of Mohammedanism, and prevented it from becoming the religion of India. It was caste that stopped the progress of Buddhism in the land of its birth and well-nigh drove it out of India. So complete was the victory of caste that Buddhism and Islam have served but to consolidate its influence. This system of caste, which has done much, both for good and evil, to mould the habits of thought of the people of India for more than 2,000 years, is, however, at length being slowly undermined by the resistless influence of Western thought and of Western civilisation. We look forward to a day when the truths to which the system of caste originally

testified will become a living power embodied in a Christian Church.

If asked to say what benefits caste has conferred upon India in the past, or what contribution it can be expected to offer to the development of Christian thought and practice in the future, our answer would be a threefold one :—

1. Caste has served to emphasise the distinctions between the carnal and the spiritual man, between the merely animal man and the man who has been "twice born". The crucial point in which the teaching of caste differs from that of the Gospels is the denial that the carnal man can ever, during his present life, become spiritual, or that the animal man can become twice born.

2. Caste has served as a constant reminder of the duty of each individual to keep himself unspotted from the world.

3. Caste has raised an effective protest against the spirit of individualism. Even if it has been the means of creating an impassable barrier between the individual and the vast majority of his fellow-men, it has enforced the observance of obligations often of a very onerous nature towards all the members of his own caste. As far as the Hindus are concerned caste obviates the necessity for a poor law, inasmuch as, except in times of general famine, the member of any particular caste can always appeal to his fellow-members with the prospect of receiving necessary assistance.

May we not reasonably hope that these important truths which underlie the institution of caste will not be laid aside when caste itself is abandoned, but will enable those whose ancestors for a hundred generations have been subjected to its influence to grasp and to develop for themselves

the similar and yet higher truths which the teaching of Christianity has to offer?

Speaking of the more definitely intellectual contribution which India will yet make to the elucidation of the Christian faith, the Bishop of Madras (Dr. Whitehead) writes: "The Indian mind will probably emphasise the philosophical aspects of the faith. Its whole interest in the past has been centred in religious philosophy. Politics, history and science have had no attractions for it. The history of Indian literature is a history of religion and philosophy. Doubtless under the influence of Western education and civilisation other interests will be developed, but it is not likely that the intellectual habits of some 3,000 years will be radically changed in the immediate future. The natural tendency of the Indian mind renders it more than probable that when the Indian Church develops a theological literature of its own, its main interest will lie in the philosophical principles which underlie the Christian faith. And it will certainly be a gain to the Church to have the Christian faith and the various problems which it raises looked at by Christian thinkers whose natural instincts will lead them to go back to first principles. The Western mind is more practical than speculative, and English people especially are much inclined to rest on traditional views of great questions, and content themselves with an intellectual compromise. Metaphysics are supremely distasteful to the ordinary Englishman, and, as a natural result, the problems of religious belief are looked at rather from a practical than a speculative point of view. We are inclined to think that *solvitur ambulando* is a sufficient answer to speculative difficulties. The Indian mind, on the other hand, will revel in the wealth of philosophic truth opened out by a belief in the Incarnation.

A beginning has already been made. The philosophic works of Father Nehemiah Goreh, Dr. Krishna Mohun Banerji and the Rev. R. C. Bose during the latter part of the last century may be regarded as the firstfruits of the special contribution which the Indian Church is destined to make to the thought of Christendom.”¹

Another who has spent the greater part of a lifetime in close touch with the natives of South India says:—

“An ideal of life which has too exclusive emphasis in this land is that which is denominated *quietism*—an ideal which extols the passive virtues as distinguished from the manly, aggressive ones. I would, by no means, claim that these two ideals are Hindu and Christian respectively. They are rather begotten of the countries and climes under which the two religions have been for many centuries fostered. To the Eastern and tropical Christian the teaching of our Lord furnishes abundant warrant for a glorifying of the passive and non-resisting virtues. And I am inclined to believe that we of the West have few things of greater importance and of deeper religious significance to learn from the East than the appreciation of such graces of life as patience and endurance under evil. We stand always prepared to fight manfully for our convictions, and to obtrude them at all points upon friend and foe alike. It is not in the nature of the East to do this. We say that he has no stamina. We call him, in opprobrium, ‘the mild Hindu’. But let us not forget that he will reveal tenfold more patience than we under very trying circumstances, and will turn the other cheek to the enemy when we rush into gross sin by our haste and ire. His is one of the hemispheres of a full-orbed character. Ours of the West

¹ *The East and the West*, vol. iii., p. 13.

is the other. Let us not flatter ourselves too positively that our assertive, aggressive part is the more beautiful or the more important. Yea, more, I question whether ours is the stronger and more masculine part of life and character; for is it not, to most of us, an easier thing to fling ourselves in vehemence against an evil in others than it is to sit calmly and patiently under a false accusation as our Lord Himself did? At least it must be left an open question as to whether the impulsive and domineering vigour of the West is preferable to the "mildness" of the East.

"What I wish to emphasise is the dissimilarity between our Western type of life and the Eastern, and to warn the Christian worker from the West against the danger of assuming that Christian life must be adorned with only those Western traits and excellences of character which are foreign, if not unpalatable, to the East—the very fault which also characterises the Hindu on his side, and which makes him feel so superior at times and so inaccessible to Christian influence. For let it not be forgotten that the Hindu regards what we call our foibles of petulance, arrogance and intolerance, with the same disapprobation and disgust as we do their more frequent violation of the seventh, eighth and ninth commands of the Decalogue. And who is to decide as to which catalogue is the worse and the more heinous in the sight of God?"¹

Few Europeans have travelled in the East but have had their patience tried by the disregard which the native shows for the value of time whether it be his own or that of his employer. The traveller who has remonstrated with a man who has failed to keep his appointment and has arrived a

¹ Dr. J. P. Jones, *The East and the West*, vol. ii., p. 172.

day or even a week late has perchance had the Eastern proverb quoted to him which says, "Haste is of the devil, tardiness of the All-merciful". As he has angrily pointed out the inconvenience which he has suffered by the delay it has perhaps never occurred to him that this disregard of the value of time is not simply a moral fault, but is the result of a mental attitude which may yet prove of value in the search after and appreciation of the highest truth. To quote the words of another writer:—

"A prominent Eastern characteristic is a disregard of time. The Oriental can wait. He is careless of the lapse of years. So his home is 'the unchanging East'. How different is this from the turmoil of the West, with its incessant rush, allowing no opportunity for rest and little for thought! Now may not this feature of the Eastern mind enable it to throw light upon that idea of timelessness which underlies the Christian doctrine of eternity, an idea so difficult for a Western mind to grasp? 'One day as a thousand years!' May it not be that in this direction the Oriental will help us better to understand the Christian Faith? Detail, however, must be conjecture. But at least let us be certain that in some direction a rich development of the Christian consciousness will be the outcome of further missionary work."¹

In proportion as the final object of Christian Missions is understood does the obligation of every professing Christian to share in them become manifest. For the claims which such work possess are not simply those suggested by pity or philanthropy. The man who helps to support mission work is, no doubt, helping to benefit individuals; but he is doing something more than this: he is helping

¹ J. C. V. Durell, *The East and the West*, vol. iii., p. 336.

to complete the Body of Christ, helping not only to interpret the significance of His life, but to make the life itself a greater objective reality.

If this, the final object of Christian Missions, were better understood, missionary societies would soon cease to complain of lack either of sympathy or support.

XII.

CHRIST THE GOAL OF HUMANITY.

IN the present chapter it is proposed to consider how far the person and character of Christ may be regarded as indicating God's original intention in regard to man whether as an individual or as a race. The subject of this chapter might be described as God's idea of humanity, the person of Christ His mode of revealing it. In these words is summed up the distinctive teaching of the Epistle to the Ephesians, a short sketch of the teaching of which will serve as the best introduction to the subject. The teaching of the Epistle will be better understood if it be compared with that to the Romans. The two represent, more clearly than any others of St. Paul's Epistles, the carefully elaborated and mature thought of the Apostle. There is one obvious characteristic which is common to the two—they are both general treatises, in the sense of not being directed against any heresies or local abuses. Before writing the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul had written to the Galatians, his object being to combat the influence of the Judaizing teachers. Before writing the Epistle to the Ephesians he had apparently written to the Colossians dealing with subjects similar to those contained in this Epistle, but treating them with special reference to the errors introduced by the Gnostic teachers at Colossæ. In each case it would seem that he desired to

deal at greater length with the subjects of which he had been speaking than he could do in letters written from a definitely controversial point of view.

Coming, then, to a direct comparison of the two, we notice that, whilst the Epistle to the Romans contains the Gospel for the individual man, the Epistle to the Ephesians contains the Gospel for humanity. It is only necessary to remember the different circumstances under which they were written to see how natural it was that this should have been the case. The first Epistle, that to the Romans, was written from Greece, where the whole tendency of thought was in the direction of individualism. "Know thyself" was at once the characteristic dictum of the philosophy of Greece and the life motto of its professors. The improvement of the individual—his progress in culture and knowledge—was the goal which was kept ever in view, both in speaking and writing. The Epistle to the Romans, then, as might have been expected from the surroundings amidst which it was written, is full of teaching in regard to the position of man as an individual, in himself and before God. The statements as to the freedom of the individual soul, and the responsibility involved in such freedom, are the truths on which the whole argument of the treatise turns.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, on the contrary, was written, not from Greece, but from Rome. The citizens of Rome were constantly occupied with thoughts relating to the organisation and the unification of the multitudinous races over which their rule extended. To them the State was of all importance, the individual, comparatively speaking, of none. They had become accustomed to regard the whole known world as united under a single head and controlled from a common centre. Never before in human

history had power and influence been centralised in a single individual to the same extent as it was in the life-time of St. Paul. Writing amidst surroundings such as these, it is easy to imagine how the Apostle would have pondered over the way in which the Gospel message, with which he considered himself to have been entrusted, was intended to meet the wants and aspirations of the Roman citizen. The privileges which were enjoyed by the Roman, in virtue of his citizenship in a world-wide empire, would suggest to him the privileges which the Christian might claim in virtue of his membership in a yet more universal society. Thoughts such as these would not only suggest themselves to his mind, but would tend to be reflected in any letter or treatise composed by him in Rome.

Both Epistles are needed, and they are needed in the order in which they were written. Nothing can precede the teaching of the Epistle to the Romans in regard to man's personal responsibility and his individual standing before God ; but no sooner has the full meaning of such teaching been grasped than questions arise as to the relation which men bear to each other, as to God's purpose for mankind, and the way by which His purpose is to be realised. Moreover, special ages need special teaching. The characteristic truths of the Epistle to the Romans in regard to individual liberty and responsibility, which were brought forward by Luther and others in the sixteenth century, were a very godsend to their contemporaries. It may be that the distinctive teaching of the Epistle to the Ephesians, in regard to the unity or unification of mankind in Christ, is the special message for which the present age is asking. The tendency of modern thought, whether within or outside the Church, is towards the recognition of the life of humanity, as distinguished

from the life of the individual. Some who have rejected altogether the Christian revelation, have gone so far as to personify their ideal and to write Humanity with a capital H, and have looked forward to the substitution of the worship of Humanity for all other religions. This sect, which originated with the French philosopher, Comte, has elaborated a liturgy, in which the following expressions occur, under the form of an address to Humanity:—

“Queen of our devotion, lady of our loving service, the one centre of all our being, the bond of all ages, the one shelter of all families of mankind, the one foundation of a truly catholic church, to whom must be ascribed honour and glory. Amen.”¹

Men such as those by whom these words were written, who, whilst they reject Christianity, nevertheless love to call themselves priests of Humanity, profess to obtain the highest inspiration from their belief. The positivist will often be found to object to Christianity on the ground that it appears to him to be the last refinement of selfishness, and as affording in this respect the greatest contrast to the religion of Comte. For whilst Christianity, as he maintains, is based upon a system of present or future rewards, and those who profess it are encouraged to spend a large portion of their time in providing for their own safety and happiness, whether here or hereafter, those who accept the religion of Comte, the religion of humanity, are bound to sacrifice themselves and their prospects here, for the general good of the race, without any ulterior hope of reward hereafter. The existence of this impression is not unnatural in view of some modern perversions of Christian teaching, but it rests upon assumptions which are

¹ Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. i. p. 424.

entirely contrary to the teaching of Christ contained in the Gospels. Christ, so far from teaching that a man could secure his own salvation if he sought it and nothing more, declared that "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (St. John xii. 25). Moreover Comte's teaching as to the destined advance of humanity and the unification and development of the race far from being inconsistent with the Christian faith is in its essential features expressed or implied in the Epistle to the Ephesians. St. Paul here urges, in more definite language than any used by Comte or his disciples, that man by himself is essentially incomplete, and that man's true destiny can only be achieved by him as a corporate whole. The difference between the follower of Christ and the disciple of Comte is this: that whereas the goal or ideal of humanity towards which the latter is blindly groping lies, according to his own admission, in the distant and uncertain future, the ideal of humanity, according to the Christian point of view, has already been realised. The teaching of Comte, which is practically the teaching of modern Positivism, is but a half truth when compared with the teaching of St. Paul, who would have described it as "not holding the head from whom all the body increaseth with the increase of God". St. Paul explains to his readers in this Epistle that the head, which is the hope and life of the body, and which has been already perfected and glorified, is a pledge that the body will one day be made like to and worthy of its head. The message of the Gospel so interpreted is one which appeals to all, to poor and rich, educated and uneducated. In this respect again it differs from the so-called Gospel of Humanity. One of the most serious objections which can be brought against the teaching of

Comte, and all systems of religious philosophy, is that, however noble an inspiration these may provide for a few highly cultivated and receptive minds, they do not appeal to the average man, still less to the poor and ignorant. A Professor of Modern History at one of our English Universities was explaining to the vicar of a large mining parish how unsatisfactory modern Christianity appeared to him to be. He said that he would gladly see its professors abandon, not only the Church's creeds, but all that in any way implied distinctive dogma, and he hoped that the day might come when it would be possible to supersede the clergy and other teachers of religion by sending out from the universities men imbued with the latest results of philosophic thought. The vicar thereupon described to the professor the character of his parish, and explained to him that drunkenness, violence and the worst forms of cruelty were of daily occurrence. He asked him what message these new teachers of philosophy would have to bring to a parish of this kind and what motives they would suggest to the people which would be likely to effect an alteration in their conduct. The answer which the professor gave, perhaps the only answer which he could have given, was that such a parish represented an abnormal state of things, which ought never to have come about, and that such cases could not be provided for. The aim of the Epistle to the Ephesians is to show, by means of the person of Christ, not merely what man ought to have become if nothing abnormal had happened in his history, but what he may yet become, despite the abnormal factor of sin which has so greatly interfered with his true progress.

A superficial study of the Epistle might perhaps suggest an objection such as the following: "The teaching here contained as to the connection between Christ and

humanity is very striking and beautiful ; but it is very difficult to apply to actual life. It is, in fact, too vague and too far removed from any scheme of practical reform." Let us try and imagine an objection of this kind suggested to the Apostle himself. Imagine any one saying to him, " All this that you tell us of the future of the human race and of the glorious prospect in store for it, is very beautiful, but it seems so unpractical and indefinite ; some may be able to grasp these ideal conceptions, but in order to render their meaning clear to men in general, would it not be possible to form some kind of association or society composed of those who are prepared to recognise that they are as closely connected with Christ and with each other as, to use your own illustration, the limbs of the body are with the head and with each other ? Would it not be desirable that those who form this society should be bound together by some outward tokens of membership and rules of admission ? " What would the Apostle's answer to such a question have been ? Would he not have said, " Yes, you need such ; indeed, without it, all that I have said in regard to the future of humanity would be but visionary. I would propose your forming such a society at once, were it not that you are already members of one exactly such as you describe. The Christian Church was instituted in order to give practical expression to these truths, to give to the world an illustration of the unity and solidarity of what may one day include the whole human race." This is the answer which we may feel sure he would have made, because such an answer may be directly deduced from the teaching of this Epistle. The corporate life of the Church is one of its most constantly recurring themes. Notice, for example, the frequent use of the preposition *σύν*, " together with," in compound words :

such as *συνεζωοποίησε*, "He quickened us together with (Christ)"; *συνήγειρε*, "He raised us up with (Him)"; *συνεκάθισεν*, "He made us sit with (Him)"; *συμπολῖται*, "fellow-citizens with (the saints)"; *συνοικοδομείσθε*, "ye are builded together"; *συγκληρόνομα, σύσσωμα, συμμέτοχα*, "fellow heirs, fellow members, fellow partakers"; *συναρμολογούμενον, συμβιβαζόμενον*, "(the body) fitly framed and knit together."

The characteristic truth which is illustrated and emphasised in its every chapter is the truth that the Church is one body in Christ. "The Epistle," it has been said, "was written to set forth the mystery contained in the words 'in Christ'. The unity of the Church is not unity in doctrine only, or unity in sentiment, or unity in organisation, or unity in hope, or in love, or in profession; but unity in Christ as the mystical body of which He is the head". The actual expression "in Christ," *ἐν Χριστῷ*, occurs thirteen times; "in Him," *ἐν αὐτῷ*, or its equivalent, twenty-three times in this Epistle. This is the bond of union which has been created by the Incarnation, a bond closer and more lasting than any which man could have devised. It may be contrasted with others which have united men together in the past. The earliest bond of union was that of the family. This was gradually extended to a group of families or a tribe. Then came the nation; then the wide, embracing empires of antiquity, which were founded, not upon any blood relationship or upon agreement, but upon force. These last, which alone compare with the Christian Church in extent, left the subject races in a condition of permanent inferiority. The solidarity of the human race which had been dimly hinted at by the Jewish prophets, was first declared and explained by those who had grasped the meaning of the Incarnation.

It is interesting to contrast the words of two great leaders of thought who spoke to the same people, the one 400 years before the Incarnation, the other fifty years after its occurrence. Aristotle, in the *Politics*, argues that the idea of the equality of all men was essentially absurd, inasmuch as the race of free men was by nature distinct, and intended by God to remain distinct, from the race of slaves. This was the belief of the Greeks, and practically of all others, until the memorable day when the Apostle St. Paul, standing on the hill of Athens, declared the great truth which he had himself deduced from the fact of the Incarnation: God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth".

Christianity has done much to secure the recognition of the potential equality of all men, though even amongst Christian peoples this equality is recognised in theory far more than in practice. In Christ's prayer He asked that His followers might be one even as He and His Father were one. It would be impossible to conceive a closer or more permanent union than that here suggested. This union, moreover, as the words immediately following explain, was to be the condition of their being made "perfect in one," or, to adopt the rendering of the Revised Version, of their being "perfected into one". To reveal and to foreshadow this union revealed in Christ is the duty and privilege of His Church.

XIII.

CHRIST INCARNATE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

IN trying to appreciate the significance of the life of Christ it is necessary constantly to bear in mind that Christianity is no mere scheme for the salvation and perfecting of individuals. Christ lived and died, not only to save men, but man. The ultimate goal of Christianity is expressed by St. Paul, in Ephesians iv. 13, in the words, "Till we all come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ". He does not say, till we all come to perfect men, but to a perfect man. The words suggest the truth that, as members incorporate in one body, men may aspire to a perfection, even the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, which, as separate individuals, they could never hope to attain. The same truth is suggested by the closing words of St. Paul's prayer on behalf of his readers, at the end of the third chapter. He prays that "they may be strong to apprehend," together "with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," that so they might "be filled unto all the fulness of God". The words imply that "the fulness of God," the goal of the Christian life, is not to be attained by any individual as such, but must be sought in closest union "with all the saints". The knowledge of Christ's love which is to lead on to this fulness is too vast for any

individual to grasp ; would he measure its breadth and length and height and depth he must do so as a member of the universal Church.

To go back to the words quoted before, " Till we all come to a perfect man ". The life of Christ affords the only real explanation of their meaning. His life is a prophecy of what God intends man to become, and as such enables us to interpret the Divine purpose in human history. It is only in proportion as the life of Christ is understood that it becomes possible to interpret aright all human history.

The traveller by night may pass through the loveliest scenery or visit the most impressive landscape, but as long as the darkness continues unbroken he remains unconscious of that which lies before him. Suddenly, however, as from the dark cloud overhead there issues the vivid gleam of the lightning flash, the outlines of the scene before him are revealed, and though the light has passed long ere he has caught the full force of what he has seen, he has at least learnt something of what to expect when the night shall have passed and the full light of the sun shall have been poured upon the scene. We have here an illustration, imperfect though it be in detail, of what the Incarnation has done in human history. Man, as we believe, was originally created innocent and in the image of God ; but during the long night of sin which followed its bright beginning that Divine likeness was more and more hidden and overclouded, till at length men ceased to believe in the existence of the Divine nature within them, and selfishness became the ruling principle of their life. Then it was that across the midnight darkness of sin the life of Christ shone with a radiant brightness which served to reveal once more the Divine image in man that sin had so nearly effaced, and at the same time to suggest the

glorious future in store when the Sun of Righteousness should be completely manifested in the world. The thought suggested by the illustration is full of encouragement in looking forward to the future. St. Paul never despaired of the destiny either of individuals or of the race. He treats the one perfect life which has been lived in the world, in all its purity and perfection, as a prophecy of what God intends men to become. The Gospel record, too, shows that He, who knew better than any one else the weakness and sinfulness of human nature, who, as we are told, needed not that any should testify of man because He knew what was in man, was never known to despair of man's future. The accomplishment of God's original intention for the human race as a whole, may have been delayed by the introduction of sin ; but we dare not believe but that the original intention will one day be fully carried out. We can sympathise with the divinely inspired confidence of the poet who could say :—

Neither vice nor guilt,
Debasement undergone by body or mind,
Nor all the misery forced upon my sight,
Misery not lightly passed, but sometimes scanned
Most feelingly, could overthrow my trust
In what we may become.¹

Let us imagine that an artist, having made a magnificent vase, were to summon all his friends to see and admire his work. Whilst they are engaged in doing so a rival artist, who has come under the disguise of a friend, moved with envy at the beauty and magnificence of what he beholds, seizes the vase in his hands, and, throwing it to the ground, dashes it into a thousand pieces. Whilst the eyes of all are turned in astonishment and indignation upon

¹ Wordsworth's *Prelude*, viii. 647;

what appears to them irreparable damage, the original artist, alone unmoved, calmly bids them wait. All he asks is that they will allow him sufficient time, and he is prepared to undo the mischief which has been done. Days, months, years pass away, and still he bids them wait, assuring them that all will be made right at last, but that meanwhile they must be content implicitly to accept his assurance. The harm so lightly accomplished will take long time and infinite patience to repair. But now at length the long awaited day arrives, and once more he bids his friends assemble to witness the restoration of his original work. And as they behold the vase which before they had seen broken into a thousand pieces, re-made out of those same pieces in such a way that nothing is lost of its original grace and beauty, they are filled with admiration for the skill and power of the artist, and to a far greater extent than if the vase had never been broken at all. This is a picture of the fall and redemption of the human race. After the creation of man, when, as we read in the Book of Job (xxxviii. 7), "The morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy," the Spirit of evil, moved with envy at the perfection of God's work, is represented as having introduced sin into its midst, and as having thus, as in a moment, wrought harm which centuries and decades of centuries have failed to undo. But though the evil accomplished is so great that it is scarcely possible to over-estimate it, all is not lost. Years, centuries, thousands of years may be required, but the time will come when the damage wrought by sin shall yet be undone, and when God's original purpose for humanity shall be carried out. Meanwhile He has given us a model of His original design. This model is the only perfect man who has yet

lived upon the earth. Would we know what God originally intended man to become ; what, despite the harm wrought by sin, we may believe that he one day will become? The answer is : " Behold the Man ". The Incarnation is the gospel of hope, and not merely or chiefly for the individual, but for the race. " We alone," said Bishop Westcott,¹ " who believe that ' the Word became flesh ' can keep hope fresh in the face of the sorrows of the world, for we alone know that evil is intrusive and remediable, we alone know that the victory over the world has been won, and that our part is to gather with patience the fruits of the victory."

If it be true, as some are ready to assert, that man is but a highly developed and highly cultured animal, and that, apart from superiority of intellect, there is little or no real difference between him and other animals, it may still be hoped that lapse of time may add something to the culture and development which have already been attained ; but, beyond this, beyond a mere increase of material luxury and enjoyment there is nothing we have any right to expect. But if, on the other hand, Christ's life is the Divine assurance of what man may one day become, if the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ is the only limit to man's possible development, then the prospect, alike for the individual and the race, may fill us with unspeakable hope and thanksgiving. Amongst the *débris* of an ancient house in Salonica (the Thessalonica of St. Paul's time) were found two funeral urns of apparently the same date ; the one bore the inscription " No hope," the other, " Christ my life ". The contrast between the two is the contrast between man's destiny as interpreted by the light of nature alone, and man's destiny as interpreted in the light of Christ's life.

¹ Hull Church Congress, 1890;

The office of the Christian Church is to proclaim this gospel of hope by interpreting the life of Christ to the world. If the work of the Church be regarded from this point of view the answer is obtained to a difficulty which often suggests itself to those outside the Church. The Socialist, for example, is inclined to say, "The society in which I believe, and which I desire to see realised, is one to which all will have an equal right to belong. It will include not simply a favoured few, such as the members of a Church must always be, but the whole human race." "Surely," he would say to us, "the aim of socialism is as far superior to that of Christianity as the whole human race is numerically superior to the members of your Church." This difficulty is often felt by those outside the Christian Church who are genuinely interested in the welfare of their fellow men. The whole tendency of modern thought is strongly against the admission of any such thing as favouritism, whether in religion or in any other sphere. As an illustration of this, it is interesting to notice the omission of the word "elect" from the American Prayer-book. What, then, is the true answer to this difficulty? May it not be said that the difficulty itself rests upon a false assumption, *viz.*, that the Church is the final expression of God's purpose towards mankind? The "purpose of the ages," to use the expression of St. Paul in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, is not simply that the Church should be rescued and redeemed, but that in "the dispensation of the fulness of the times" "all things should be summed up" in Christ through the instrumentality of the Church. This is the teaching alike of the Old and of the New Testaments. The Old Testament is the history of a people, insignificant in number, who occupied a country about the same size as the county of York-

shire, and were remarkable not for their superior learning, civilisation, or military power, but rather for their obstinate, unsociable, usurious character ; who, nevertheless, were chosen out of all the nations of the ancient world to be the recipients of peculiar blessings. As the writings of their own prophets show, the temptation to which they were constantly yielding was that of supposing that these blessings were intended to be confined to themselves, or were given to them in consequence of their own desert. Their thoughts were constantly directed to the time when the blessing, given in the first instance to them, should extend to "all the families of the earth," and when a salvation should be revealed which should not only be the glory of God's people Israel, but should also "be a light to lighten the Gentiles".

When we pass from the Old Testament to the New we are met with an exactly similar phenomenon. Here, again, we read of an elect people, no longer confined to any particular country, but still insignificant in number as compared with the whole human race, occupying as the Jews did in the Old Testament times, a position of unspeakable privilege. The explanation of the fact is the same as before. The Christian Church has been chosen or elected out of the human race, not because of any goodness inherent in its members, but in order that, through them, the purpose of Divine love may be accomplished towards all. The election of the few was never intended to mean the rejection of the many, and to think so is to fall into the very mistake of the Jews of old. Christ's own action affords the clearest illustration of the object for which the Christian Church exists. The method of His work was this : instead of attempting to spread His influence directly over whole masses of people, He chose out, from among those whom He desired to influence, a few individuals, and spent the

greater part of His time in teaching and educating them so that when He left the world He might leave behind Him those who could carry on the work which He had begun ; the nucleus, in fact, of the Christian Church. The method of Christ's work is the method of God's dealings with men in all time. The Christian Church came into being and still exists in order to carry on Christ's work in accordance with His own method. The members of the Church are an elect body, drawn from all sections of humanity, in order that they may act as the channel of communication, whereby the blessing which God intends for the whole may be secured to it. The privileges which belong to its members are theirs in trust for others. They are a "kind of first-fruits," a pledge and promise of greater things to come.

The question then suggests itself—and none can be of greater interest—does this view of the Church's mission imply that the blessings which it holds in trust for all will be eventually shared by all? Can we, dare we, believe that evil will one day be entirely removed from the universe, and that all will be eventually saved? The only source from which we can hope to obtain the answer to this question is the New Testament, but the answer which it affords is far from being clear or unmistakable. There are some passages which seem to say "yes," and others which seem to say "no". The question is one which we must be content to leave. We do not understand how evil originated, we know not how it will end. It may be that just as the mystery of its origin is too great for human understanding, so is it with the mystery of its final issue. This, at any rate, is certain, that the purpose of God will not fail or be defeated, and that its fulfilment will far exceed anything that the limited and selfish thoughts of men

have ever conceived. Knowing this, our creed becomes to us a "glorious chant of hope"; knowing this, we can, as in the prayer for the Church militant, not only "make prayers and supplications," but also "give thanks for all men".

The Christian Church is the outcome of the Incarnation, not only because it is the divinely appointed channel whereby the blessings resulting from the work of Christ become available for the world, but because it is the completion, and, in a sense, the continuation of the Incarnation. Clement of Alexandria maintained that Christ was always incarnate in the world. His words are: "Even as through the body the Saviour used to speak and heal, so did He in former times through the prophets; so does He now through the Apostles and teachers: for the Church subserves the activity of the Lord. Hence, both at the time He took upon Him Man, that through Him He might subserve the Father's will, and also *at all times God*, the Lover of Man, *clothes Himself with Man*, to the attainment of the salvation of men".¹ That the completion of the Incarnation is contingent upon the development of the Christian Church is involved in the teaching of St. Paul in Ephesians i. 23,² where he says of the Church that it is the "fulness of him that filleth all in all". These words should probably be translated, "the fulness of him who all in all is being fulfilled". The word which occurs here (*πληροῦσθαι*) is always used in the New Testament in a passive sense, and, with a single irrelevant exception, is always so used in classical Greek. It occurs in this Epistle in the verse, "be filled with the Spirit" (v. 18), and is so

¹ Clem. Alex. *Ecl. Proph.* 23.

² Cf. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, by the Dean of Westminster, pp. 42-45, 152.

translated in the first three versions which were made of the New Testament—the Latin, the Syriac and the Egyptian. It is thus rendered by early Greek commentators, as, for example, Origen and Chrysostom. The former, writing on this passage, says,¹ “Wherefore Christ is fulfilled in all that come unto Him, whereas he is still lacking in respect of them before they have come”. This translation, moreover, is in harmony with the thought of St. Paul, expressed both in this Epistle and elsewhere. In writing to the Colossians (i. 24) he says: “I fill up in your stead the remainder (or deficits) of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh on behalf of his body which is the Church”. In some mysterious manner, which we cannot clearly understand, which probably St. Paul himself only partly understood, the Church is the fulness of Him who all in all is being fulfilled; that is, the Church is that without which the Christ is not Himself complete; the Church is that through which He lives, and as the Church grows toward perfection, the Christ grows likewise towards completion. Possibly the statement in regard to Christ, in Col. ii. 9, “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (σωματικῶς), is to be interpreted in connection with the statement in the preceding chapter, “He is the head of the body, the Church”; and thus the words in Col. ii. 9 would be equivalent to saying that the fulness of God dwelleth in the body of which Christ is the head.

¹ Cramer, *Catena in Ephes.* pp. 113 et seq.

XIV.

CONCLUSION.

ONE who had read some of the earlier chapters of this book remarked, "I quite agree that the character of Christ was unique, nor would I deny that its uniqueness is a strong argument that it was something more—call it, if you will, divine; but how does the uniqueness, or even divinity, of Christ's character affect me? Am I any better off, because I know that long centuries ago a wonderful, or even divine, man lived and died upon this earth?"

In order to answer this question it is worth while to sum up in a few sentences the practical conclusions which, it may be claimed, follow from what has been said.

1. The reverent study of Christ's character, apart from all questions of disputed interpretation, has ever tended to create within men a desire to raise the standard of their own lives. "We needs must love the highest, when we see it."¹ Constant meditation upon His character leads man on at last to an intuitive apprehension of Himself, and does for him what no enlargement of his mental horizon, and what no acceptance of mere ideas, can ever do. For, as has been said, "ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapour, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us

¹ *Idylls of the King*: "Guinevere".

with warm breath; they touch us with soft responsive hands; they look at us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame.”¹ Happy is he who has passed beyond the stage of studying Christ’s character, as it is revealed in the Gospel portrait, to recognise in Him, Who stands behind the portrait, a living Person, Who not merely embodied, in the distant past, our noblest conceptions of human character, but Who by His “gentle compulsion” would fain make us like Himself.

2. To the question, “Am I any better off, because I know that long centuries ago a wonderful, or divine, man lived and died upon this earth?” the answer depends upon whether or no we believe that this “wonderful, or divine, man” was indeed a real man. If we believe this, the knowledge that One, who was a man like ourselves, rose far above the ordinary standard of human experience cannot but inspire us with hope in regard to our own future, and that apart altogether from a belief in the particular doctrines which He is said to have taught. Moreover, if as the result of a careful study of His character, we are led to accept as true the teaching attributed to Him in the Gospels, the further question will then present itself—How is it possible for a man to establish a vital connection between Christ’s character and his, so that it may be to him no mere ideal to be admired from afar, but the pattern by which to form his own? The answer to this further question is to be found in the instructions which Christ gave to His disciples with

¹ *Scenes in Clerical Life*: “Janet’s Repentance,” chap. xix.

reference to His continued presence in their midst through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, for it is only as men grasp the meaning of Christ's teaching in reference to the action of the Holy Spirit that they can appreciate the significance of His life and character in relation to their own. After promising to His disciples that the Holy Spirit should shortly be given to them, He said, "I will not leave you orphans, I come unto you".¹ The Christian Church is in a true sense a continuation of the Incarnation. Thus St. Paul says of himself, "It was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal His Son in me".² In the same way it may be said that what happened on the day of Pentecost was the revelation of Christ in His disciples. The Holy Spirit's presence was understood by the early Christians to be at once the means and the assurance of the perpetual incarnation of the Divine in man, even as we read, "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us";³ or again, as in the words of St. Paul, "we all with unveiled face reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit".⁴

"The Holy Ghost," says Professor Moberly, "is mainly revealed to us as the Spirit of the Incarnate. If it be once conceded that the revelation of the Holy Ghost is a revelation of the New Testament, not of the Old, it will be obvious that that revelation in the New Testament is made, not as an independent or separate vista into truth, but as a sort of necessary sequel or climax to the meaning of Incarnation, at the moment when Incarnation proper—that is, the life lived by God the Son in flesh upon earth—was immediately drawing to its close. The meaning of

¹ St. John xiv. 18, R.V. marg.

² Gal. i. 15 *et seq.*

³ 1 St. John iii. 24.

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 18, R.A.V. marg.

the Incarnation was not exhausted—there is a sense in which it may be said to have hardly yet begun—when Jesus Christ passed away from this visible scene of mortal life. That real significance of the Incarnation, hardly then as yet begun, is to be recognised . . . in the presence and working here on earth of the Spirit of the Incarnation and of the Incarnate.”¹ If Christ’s character is to be reproduced in us to the fullest extent, it can only be by the help of Christ’s Spirit.² Though the study of His character may inspire us to make an effort to imitate His example, the closest union or assimilation can only be obtained by those who have consciously claimed the gift of His Spirit as their own. For, “it is not by becoming like Him that men will approach towards incorporation with Him but by incorporation with Him, received in faith as a gift, and in faith adored and used that they will become like Him”.³

3. The character of Christ reveals to Man his own true nature. Aristotle has said, “the nature of a thing is that which it has become, when its process of development is completed,”⁴ and his words suggest to us the significance of Christ’s life and character. Man is, as Aristotle says, what he may become. What Man may become we learn from seeing what the Son of Man actually was.

The study of this character thus furnishes the key to the study of all human character. Christ’s character reveals what the character of Man might now be, were it not for human selfishness ; what, we believe, it will be when,

¹ R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, pp. 194 *et seq.*

² As justifying the use of this expression, *cf.* Acts xvi. 7, “the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not”.

³ R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, p. 284.

⁴ Arist., *Politics*, i., 2 : οἷον γὰρ ἑκάστων ἐστὶ τῆς γενέσεως τελεσθείσης ταύτην φάμεν τὴν φύσιν εἶναι ἑκάστων.

by the help of the "Spirit of Jesus," we gain, whether here or hereafter, a perfect victory over self.

The character of Man is like a masterpiece of painting, in which traces are still to be found that suggest how different the original design must have been from that which we now see, but which has become so marred and disfigured, as to render it impossible for us, apart from outside help, to be sure what the original design was. Athanasius draws an illustration from a portrait painted on wood, and argues that as the wood is still preserved, in the hope that the portrait may some day be restored, so the human race, on whom God's likeness has been placed, is preserved, in the hope that through Christ, the Divine Original, God's likeness may yet be restored.¹

Some of the experts in natural history and anthropology, who have been called in to explain the portrait of man, as it now is, profess to believe that he is nothing more than a very clever and highly developed animal. But, such assertions notwithstanding, the very "longings, yearnings, strivings, for the good they comprehend not," which come to men in their best moments with an assurance that increases with the power to interpret them, prove that if their bodily frames are connected with the beasts below, their real self, of which their character is the index, is as certainly connected with the Divine above them. Had not the portrait of Christ been preserved, the task of elucidating man's true nature, and still more that of reproducing the original design of the Artist, might have been regarded as impossible. But, as it is, not only does man gain from the Gospel portrait the knowledge of what God intends his life to become, and the inspiration to guide his

¹ *De Incar.* xiv,

efforts, but, with this portrait in his hands, he can interpret to others the latent good which, by the help of Christ's Spirit, may yet be realised.

How far-reaching this knowledge is, if we could but fully grasp it! "If we could all really believe, really know, that we human beings are a manifestation in some faint degree of God's Life on earth—'homes for the Eternal'; if we all realised that the noblest lives, and far above the noblest, the vision of Christ, have shown us what man is meant to be, then there would spring up everywhere what we see struggling for expression in a few—a respect, an awe, for every human being as such. We should honour all men. The poor child of the streets, the stunted and starved lives of so many workers sacrificed to our civilisation, the far-off missionary fields, would then cry to us with a different voice. We could not forget them. With that voice in our ears, not only the life of aimless expenditure, and the round of amusement, which is neither the refreshment after labour nor the preparation for it, but the conventional semi-religious life as well—how unworthy it all looks! How great the need, how noble the work of permeating our commercial, social, and political and religious life with some guiding and inspiring principle, by awakening the world to the ever-present Divine!"¹

It is "the vision of the ideal," said Bishop Westcott, that "guards the monotony of work from becoming the monotony of life".

In Browning's epilogue to his "Dramatis Personæ," Renan is introduced as the exponent of modern scepticism and is represented as lamenting in pathetic language that the Divine Face, which once looked down from heaven

¹ *The Gospel of the Atonement*, Arch. J. M. Wilson, pp. 151, 152.

upon men, has disappeared, seemingly for ever, whilst "shuddering" humanity has discovered that it is itself installed in the place from which God has by science been dethroned :—

Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most
On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls.

The poet then intervenes, in his own person, and shows by means of an illustration, borrowed from the experience of the Arctic explorer, that the forces of life practically reproduce for each individual in turn that which has seemingly been lost to the world. No change, he seems to say, can obliterate altogether the Divine vision, to the reality of which the experience of the individual testifies.

The poem closes with the words :—

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows.

On one occasion Browning read this Epilogue aloud to a friend, and at the close said : "That face is the face of Christ. That is how I feel Him !"

The object of the "Studies" contained in this volume is to contribute in some small degree to the delineation of that face of incarnate love. By reverent and constant study of the character of Christ it will become possible to enter into the meaning of St. Paul's words : "God hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

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